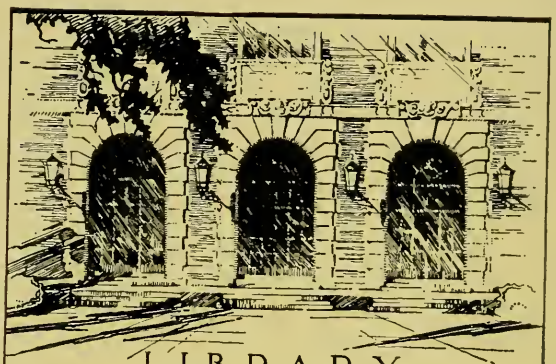

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THE WARDS OF PLOTINUS

By MRS. JOHN HUNT

THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. III.

STRAHAN AND COMPANY LIMITED
34, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

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THE WARDS OF PLOTINUS.

CHAPTER I.

THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW SOCIETY.

SOME months had elapsed since Plotinus propounded his scheme for the regeneration of society. He had never ceased to think of it, but there had been various obstacles in the way of any effort at its realization. It was his intention to commence the experiment with his wards, but the absence of Iope at Baiæ, the increasing weakness of Acatia, the visit of the children of Sulpitius to some relatives in Campania, and the relapse of Laberius into the company of the Sophists, separated

them and caused a delay. Now, however, the opportunity so ardently desired by the philosopher appeared to have arrived. The absent had returned, the lost had been found, and Plotinus resolved to lose no more time in carrying out his design. He hastened to the house of Paulinus and informed his wards that he had something to say which concerned them all, and was of great importance to their future lives.

"Let us hear thee speak in the garden, O guardian," pleaded Acatia, "that I may not interrupt thee by my weakness, for I can scarcely breathe to-day."

Plotinus looked at her with pity in his eyes. It was evident that she would take no part in his grand project. But perhaps, knowing it, her spirit would watch the enterprise and assist to ensure its success.

He turned thoughtfully and passed out

into the shady garden towards a favourite arbour.

Then danced forth Iope, with the laughing orphans clinging about her, catching at her garments and imploring her to run races, followed by Acatia, her slight form rather carried than supported by the encircling arms of Laberius and Quintilia.

"O flowers," said she, as she looked down upon the blossoms blooming profusely around, "I come to take my farewell of you."

They placed her upon a marble bench under the spreading vine which formed the arbour, with her head on the shoulder of Laberius. Iope and the orphans nestled at her feet, and Quintilia stood like the guardian angel of the group with her finger upon her lip.

Then spoke Plotinus. He told his wards of his design to establish a city on new

principles, from which all vice was to be banished, and in which morality and piety were to be the great objects of life. He was to enter upon the great work that day, and his children were to consider themselves as the beginning of a kingdom of righteousness which would yet be mighty against the evil that was in the world. He instructed them how they were to live, and promised that they should all have exercises suited to their capacities, and such as they most needed.

When he had ended speaking he seemed for a few moments to be transported from the world. His face shone with a strange brightness, as if illumined by light from heaven. It was that glowing season in the early summer when to the devout soul nature has most of God. Plotinus looked up as from a dream, and fixed his eyes on the setting sun. To him at that moment it

was more than ever the symbol and memorial of that One whom no eye could behold, no intellect comprehend, the ineffably pure and good. He then spoke of the joy he had before his descent into matter, and the many struggles he had undergone to be delivered from its bonds. His spirit, he said, often in ecstatic moments had draughts of the bliss of reunion with God, but he longed for the fulness of satisfaction, the complete return into the ocean of Deity. And what he sought for himself he sought for all men, and he would now pray for success to the new efforts begun that day for the regeneration of men. Then rising from his seat he lifted his eyes to the sun and said:—

"O glorious image of the invisible God, thyself a god, thou hast proceeded from the unknown Brightness, and art contending with the darkness of matter. Another day

of thy mighty warfare is closing, and thou departest like a victorious warrior, with thy garments dyed in blood. Not this earth only, but the whole universe, rejoices in thy might, and daily praises thee for thy victories over the realms of darkness. This day have I made a new endeavour to be a fellow-worker with thee. Accept my homage, hear my prayer, restore harmony to the world, awake the souls that are asleep in the Hades of matter,—imprisoned in the cavern of a polluted body. Illumine their darkness, and fill them with that light which proceeds from the fountain of light. The god within me aspires to the perfection of brightness. Let the wings of my soul expand, let me breathe a freer air, and leave behind the boisterous waves by which I am tempest-tossed on the troubled sea of matter. I have been torn from thy bosom, O divine sun, abode of life and light. Every day I

strive to draw nearer to thee, impatient of tarrying longer in the dark region of this corporeal life. Like an exile in a distant land, I look towards thee, and have a glimpse of my native home. With a heavy heart and a mournful step I walk this earth. It is not my rest. Once I held fellowship with the celestial gods, and with a Bacchanalian joy my soul danced around thy glorious orb. O thou resplendent image of that Being who is above all being, the source and fountain of life and the soul of the universe, deliver me from the limitations of the flesh. Take me back to the country from which I am exiled, where no sorrow can trouble me, no change come upon me, but where among the gods I, too, shall be a god."

When this prayer was uttered Plotinus rose, bade his wards return to the house, and walked into the deepest shade of the

garden with a slow and solemn step. The shadows of the twilight were now gathering fast, a gentle breeze shook the rustling leaves of the trees, and a melodious bird was singing to rest the wearied day. The philosopher, overpowered by emotion, entered into converse with the Spirit of Nature. He talked audibly to himself, uttering ejaculations and disjointed sentences.

"At this moment," he exclaimed, "I feel the presence of the Unseen but Ever Near. He is in the soft wind that makes music among the leaves. He is in the fragrance that ascends from these flowers. He glows in that glorious departing sun. He breathes the breath of this balmy air. All the voices of nature are the voice of God. His life is the life of the world. Men are misled by their senses. They take matter for a substance, and, blinded by multiplicity, they do not see the

all-embracing Unity. The visible world is but the varied forms of the All-Life. Each is linked to each, but only the purified eye can look beneath the surface and see the universal harmony. The stone is kindred to the clay, the clay to the mould, the mould to the flower, the flower to the insect, the insect to flesh and fowl and four-footed beasts. One soul animates all, and is ever energizing towards a higher life. The world is in progress from matter to soul, from soul to spirit, and from spirit to God. That which came forth from the One, to the One returns. As the river flows to the ocean, and the nearer it approaches the more like it it becomes, so visible nature, starting apparently from the soulless, progresses in life and intelligence, till in man it becomes conscious of its divine origin, its exile in this life, and the certainty of its return to God."

It was a mixed company with which Plotinus began his experiment, but the world is also mixed. He had a fair specimen of the material on which he was to work. The physician was perfectly incredulous, as well he might be from the standpoint of a practical man of the world. But Plotinus must be numbered with the men of faith, who out of weakness were made strong. It was a divine work on which he was entering. He was on the side of the good, and he believed in its final triumph, though he did not see the difficulties in his way from the complex nature of human life and human emotions. All great reformers are one-sided. If they looked calmly at all the difficulties before them they would never act. If they weighed each objection their zeal would become cold during the process of weighing. The world's greatest benefactors have been

enthusiastic men whose schemes seemed impracticable, and who have been derided as dreamers or madmen. But even when their schemes have failed, their end has been attained, or they have contributed something to its attainment. It was the childlike simplicity of Plotinus that made him great. The atmosphere in which he breathed was above the world, and therefore he was able to benefit the world.

The day after the inauguration of the new society, Paulinus the physician was called to attend some cases of fever in the *Diverticulum Boarium*, a wretched alley between the Tiber and the Velabrum. The summons had been sent by Fabian, and when he arrived the aged bishop met him at the door of one of the infected houses, accompanied by one of his deacons, who carried nourishment for the sick.

"*Salve*, O Fabian!" exclaimed Paulinus,

as he approached the venerable man. "You put your hand early to the plough."

"Is there not need?" replied Fabian. "The work is heavy and the labourers are few. Never were worse cases of fever than in this *diverticulum.*"

"We must treat it as we do the Jews," said the physician, laughing,—"stamp it out."

"I know not how this can be done," said the bishop thoughtfully, "while the people live in such dwellings as these; they are the very nurseries of fever."

As he spoke, some squalid children rolled over each other in the mud, and the sound of their merry laughter rang through the alley.

The physician regarded them with a smile. "At all events," said he, "there is health. Observe these robust faces, and hear the music produced by these strong lungs."

"It is marvellous," said Fabian, "how these children live, and how strong they are; but I suppose it is only those who are born with good constitutions that live at all."

"Nature always chooses," answered Paulinus. "She works to fulfil an ideal, and sends forth her material in rich abundance, but she cares nothing for single lives. All is sacrificed to accomplish her ends."

"But many would be saved if cared for," said Fabian. "There is a fearful waste of life in Rome. We must build hospitals, and make provisions for the poor in sickness."

"And save those whom Nature does not design for life," said Paulinus; "and the effect of their preservation will be the deterioration of the race. The rich preserve their weaklings when the world would be better without them, and you would do the same for the poor."

"And does not humanity itself," said Fabian, "teach us to care for all human life, to do all we can to preserve it? and in preserving it are we not benefiting ourselves? But what can we do while the city has such plague-spots as this alley? And what prospect is there for morality while these dens are the abodes of human beings?"

"Let Nature have her own way," said Paulinus. "She knows what is best for every one of us. If she cared as much for morality as you and Plotinus do, there would be plenty of it, but her delights are not in that region. You cannot compel her to a behaviour which is foreign to her disposition. All schemes for such an object will be sure to fail."

"I think not so," replied Fabian. "We can turn a wood into a garden without destroying its beauty."

"Well, well," answered Paulinus, "I say

nothing against your efforts. Reformation is required, and it is only to be attained by such enthusiastic and sanguine souls as you, O Fabian; and our good philosopher Plotinus hath already made his first step. Yesterday he called his wards together and united them into a society which is to be the beginning of the new creation. He contemplates nothing less than the entire renovation of the whole world. Laberius is to be cured of his follies by a course of geometry and dialectics, Iope is to have her levity removed by studying the science of numbers and harmony as expounded by Pythagoras, and Quintilia is to read lectures on Plato to the young Sulpitians while she attends upon the sick Acatia. Then they are all to live together acrording to laws, and to think about nothing but goodness and grace and gravity. Nevertheless, Aulus Camillus is to continue his visits to his betrothed; and—and—what the

result will be we must leave Plotinus to discover when he awakes from his dream."

The physician disappeared within one of the houses as he uttered the last sentiment, and Fabian, half-amused, half-pleased with what he had heard, proceeded on his errands of mercy.

Three days afterwards Paulinus said to Plotinus :—

"Philosopher, I am sorry to interfere with your arrangements, but Acatia grows weaker. She stands on the threshold of Hades and cannot be disturbed. Iope and the children of Sulpitius must be sent to Laurentum under the care of Valaria."

CHAPTER II.

ACATIA'S DEATH.

A DARK shadow was over the house of Paulinus,—the shadow of the angel of death. He stood on the threshold and beckoned Acatia to come forth, and they that were with her bowed themselves and wept, for they lamented her departure to the land of shadows. To them it appeared as if she were about to sink into an unfathomable abyss which engulfed all that they loved most, but she smiled, for she saw what they could not see, because their eyes were blinded by their ignorance of eternal life. Looking across the dark valley she beheld the portals of heaven, and therein

a lamp hung, which cast a shining bridge over the danger.

"I am content," she said. "I am not afraid to die. I know in whom I have believed, and He will guide me safely to the kingdom of God."

But her brother and sister were not comforted. Quintilia mourned continually in her heart, uttering no word, heaving no sigh, as she moved hither and thither in attendance upon the sick; while Laberius was like one bereft of his senses. Only at intervals would Paulinus permit him to approach the couch of the dying maiden. But as the danger increased, and the old physician saw that there was no hope, he ceased to interpose his objections, and Laberius sat almost constantly at the side of his sister.

For him alone she was troubled. She knew that Quintilia was coming every day nearer and nearer to the truth, and she felt

that those glimpses of its beauty which her own tranquil and hopeful departure would be certain to afford were only needed to assure its acceptance. But when she thought of Laberius,—the fickle, doubting priest of Jupiter, her only brother, her well-beloved brother,—there was bitterness in her cup; the tears sprang into her eyes, and she would pray earnestly for the healing of the waters of Marah.

Acatia reposed in the lightest of slumbers, and her face shone with a celestial brightness; her lips moved as if she talked with messengers from another world. Laberius, sitting by her side, felt a strange awe as he gazed upon her countenance. Never before had he been so impressed with the sense of the presence of something divine. His whole past life seemed to start up like a spectre before him, and he loathed the sight. It had been the life of a man out of harmony

with himself, and now he felt the power of that harmony which prevails in the spiritual world.

Acatia suddenly but quietly awoke, and her gaze fell upon Laberius with his head resting upon his hands. She touched him softly, and he started from his reverie like a watcher abruptly aroused from sleep.

"What dost thou desire?" he inquired in a hurried and suppressed voice.

"Take my hand," she answered, with a smile; and when he had done so she looked at him and said:—

"O Laberius, I have been pleading for you with Gabriel, the chief of the angels that are before the throne of God. He came to tell me of my speedy departure from this life, and my admission among the host of the redeemed. I rejoice greatly at the intelligence, but over the brightness of my joy there came a cloud. I remembered thee, O

my brother, Laberius,—I remembered that thou wert still a heathen,—a priest of Jupiter,—one whose life was according to the course of this world, in the lusts of the flesh and the vanity of the mind, and I besought Gabriel that thou mightest have the prayers and intercessions of the saints and the cherubim for thy redemption. Fervently I made my petition, with many words and many tears, for the desire of my heart is to have thee numbered with the just."

Laberius buried his head in the coverlid which was spread over his sister, and hid the tears which he could not prevent.

Acatia, aware of the emotion which she had awakened, paused for a moment, and strengthened herself to say more by an inward prayer.

Then pressing the hand which caressed hers with a fervency which startled the young priest, she exclaimed in a loud, clear voice:—

"O brother, the only true rest is in Christ. When we but touch the hem of His garment we are made whole. You see me weak in body, but as the outward man decays the inward man is daily renewed. Were you to die you would lose all, for you are capable of no pleasures but those of sense; and so, while to you death would be the most awful calamity that could befall you, to me it is but the fuller enjoyment of a life already begun."

"Sister," answered Laberius, trying to compose himself, "it is indeed, in my judgment, the worst evil that can happen to any one to go down to the shades in the very morning of life;—to look no more on this beautiful world, to be in darkness when the sun is gladdening the earth, to lie in the charnel-house when our friends are rejoicing in their festive hours. O Acatia, it is too awful. I shudder, I start back appalled at the prospect."

"Because," said Acatia, "you do not see the light beyond. Death has no terrors to them whose eyes have been opened. They see that he is no enemy, but a real friend, delivering the spirit from the earthly tabernacle, and bringing it into a house which is eternal in the heavens. I cannot say that I have no regrets at parting from my friends, and, many as the sorrows of life have been, it has still had its joys. But I only go before. The sorrows of parting are necessary, yet they have their compensations. Laberius, you will never understand life till you learn that there is nothing to fear in death."

Laberius could say no more. His heart was too heavy. Emotions of all kinds pressed upon him. He left the sick-room and returned to his own chamber. Next day he had to perform the sacrifices in the temple. He ascended the Capitoline with

slow steps, and would have been glad if some brother priest had relieved him of duties which had never been more distasteful than they were that day. After performing them in haste and in the most perfunctory manner, he returned to the house of Paulinus, striving by the way to banish the melancholy which brooded over his soul. In vain; his sister's illness, his past life, the uncertainty of a future existence, and the certainty that even should there be one such as that in which Acatia believed he had no part in it, all united to disturb the repose of his mind.

Plotinus sat by the couch of Acatia, but she knew it not. He watched her tranquil sleep, and wondered at the smiles which stole over her countenance—indications of the sweet visions and revelations which she saw in her slumber.

The entrance of Laberius, noiselessly as

it was made, disturbed the dying maiden. She opened her eyes, bright with the light which precedes the mist of death, and looked around, regarding each of her friends with a wistful, tender scrutiny.

"Ah!" she said, "I am glad to have you here. Abide with me, I pray you, until the coming of the messenger. He will be with us soon—soon. An angel told me in my sleep. To-night I shall be in Paradise."

Quintilia shivered, and a sob shook the frame of Laberius. The philosopher bent over Acatia and kissed her brow.

"Thou art happy, O little one?" he whispered. "How I envy thee!"

"Yes," she answered, "happy, and without pain."

"The body forgets its infirmities, overcome by the transports of the spirit," murmured Plotinus.

Then entered the physician, and Acatia

greeted him with a flush of pleasure. The tears started into the eyes of Paulinus when he saw the condition of his patient, but he turned his face away from her gaze, and affected to rally her on her improved appeearance.

"Red in thy cheeks!" he exclaimed. "Roses, by sweet Hebe! It is long since we saw them there. Surely you have taken a new lease of life, O Acatia. Before many months we shall have thee calling us weaklings."

Acatia smiled, and shook her head.

"O physician," said she, "you think you understand the body, but even that will be a mystery till you know more of the soul. I know that I am to die before many hours have passed. The apparent restoration of my physical strength is merely the joy of the spirit in the prospect of its release. The house is falling to pieces, but the inhabitant

is making unusual efforts to keep it together until the time comes for its departure."

Paulinus made no answer, he had none to make; but if he had had one there would have been no time. Acatia, exhausted by speaking, began to cough violently. When the paroxysm was over she was too feeble to say more. Breathing a desire to see Fabian, she turned her head upon her pillow and showed a disposition to sleep.

Meanwhile the sun set, and an armada of sombre clouds arising in the east floated majestically across the horizon towards the still illumined west; the mysterious twilight, stealing from her recess, spread a veil athwart the city, bade her attendant shadows keep a guard over every object, and hushed all nature to sleep.

"Quintilia."

The low, clear voice of the dying maiden broke the long silence which had been

kept by her watchers, with a mysterious music.

The guardian sister, the thoughtful philosopher, the wearied physician, the noiseless yet restless Laberius, were severally startled, and each rose to approach the couch and inquire what was desired. But Quintilia alone asked the question. She pressed her lips upon the damp, cold brow of Acatia, and whispered in her ear.

"Hath Fabian arrived?" said Acatia.

"Not yet, beloved; but we have sent for him, he cannot be long."

"Laberius."

Laberius took the fragile hand which was stretched forth feebly to meet his, and embraced it with tears.

The dying maiden smiled. "Thou lovest me, O my brother," said she. "Thou art loth to part with me; but be comforted, the parting is not for ever. If thou seekest

the truth ardently, diligently, thou shalt find it in Christ, and then thou shalt come into His kingdom, whither I go. Cast down your idols. The true God, as Plotinus hath often said,

> "Is not graven in marble,
> Is not beheld;
> His abode is not known,
> Unknown is His name in heaven;
> He doth not manifest His form,
> Vain are all representations."

He is the God whom Plotinus seeks, whom the Christians know. Doubt it not, but commend thyself unto Him, and He will make thee feel in thy heart that this is true. I feel it, and a peace—a hope that passeth all understanding—possesseth my soul"

Laberius wept.

Acatia passed her fingers lightly through his hair. "Do not despair," said she tenderly. "The way is dark and difficult for one like thee, but Quintilia will lead thee."

"How can that be?" replied Quintilia mournfully. "There is still a mist before my eyes."

Acatia looked at her with a radiant smile.

"Sister," said she, "is not the mist more transparent? I have watched it, and I am sure there is not so much gloom. When the portals of heaven are opened to admit me, the light that floateth therefrom shall disperse all thy remaining doubt."

She spoke with an accent of certainty which impressed all who heard her.

"May it be so," murmured Quintilia, as she administered the cordial which she had been preparing.

"And thou wilt not forget Iope when thou art safe on the Rock of Ages," said Acatia, as she returned the empty cup, "nor any of our friends? Thou wilt seek to guide them all out of the depths of sin unto the shore of eternal life."

"Fear not," answered Quintilia. "If I find the light I will not fail to make it evident to others. I will hold it aloft for all the world to see."

"I know it! I feel it!" exclaimed Acatia. "O Quintilia, what a joyful reunion we shall have in the land of the redeemed!"

She gasped for breath, but she appeared to be unconscious of her painful respiration. Pointing upwards, she fixed her eyes upon space, and gazed as though she had a glimpse of the celestial city. A smile, an expression of expectation, of longing, indescribably sweet, made her face shine, and her cheeks were flushed with the strength of the emotion which stirred within her bosom.

Paulinus, who had been observing his patient with attention from a seat behind the others, now rose, and approached her couch.

"You talk too much, O little one," he said, in a gentle voice of reproval. "Rest now."

Acatia shook her head. "I can rest no more on earth," said she softly. "Mine hour is come, and I must speak while I may."

Paulinus said no more; he retreated hastily to the dark corner. Not able to suppress the emotion which he felt, he determined to conceal it.

Calmly the philosopher stepped into the place vacated by the physician, and stood looking down upon Acatia. There was no sorrow in his face, for he felt none. He thought the situation of his ward was an enviable one. She was about to cast off the burden of the flesh and to repose in the bosom of the Divine. How gladly would he have exchanged places with her! He smiled as he contemplated her bright face—

bright with the reflection of the light in her soul.

"Hast thou no last words for me, O favoured Acatia?" he asked in a low pleasant voice.

"Beloved guardian," she answered, "farewell for a brief while. Thou that teachest man to be like Christ must needs find Christ in God's own time."

Plotinus shook his head, and the smile upon his countenance faded away.

"Thou canst not understand, O innocent!" he said.

As he spoke the aged Fabian entered the chamber attended by Balus, who carried a cup and a covered *patina.*

Acatia clasped her hands together joyfully as soon as she saw them.

"Now is the last desire of my heart fulfilled," she exclaimed. Then she requested to have her head raised as high as it was

possible, and Quintilia piled cushion upon cushion behind her until she sat upright, with her beautiful hair streaming about her like a golden veil.

Thus she was to take the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Gently motioning her friends to stand aside, she called unto Fabian in a clear voice :—

"O servant of the Lord, draw near and support me through the valley of the shadow of death with thy comfortable words."

"Thou art not in alarm, O my daughter?" replied Fabian, approaching the couch. "The strength of thy hope is discovered by the expression of thy face. Thou art happy and comforted in thy departure by thy faith in Christ."

"It is more than faith now," was the reply. "It is knowledge. *Now* I *know* in whom I have believed."

"Amen," said Balus in a sonorous voice. "This is holy ground." And he knelt down.

Fabian took the cup and the *patina* from his hand. There was wine in the cup, bread on the *patina.*

"Let us eat the Passover together," said he, "before our sister goeth forth."

"In remembrance of His Passover," said the deacon.

"Let us drink of the fruit of the vine in commemoration of the blood which He shed for us," continued Fabian.

"Before I drink new wine with Him in His Father's kingdom," murmured Acatia.

The aged bishop bent his stiff form by the side of Balus and uttered a fervent prayer. He thanked the great invisible Creator of all things for the peace and faith which possessed the dying maiden, and he cried unto the Lord of lords to send down His Holy

Spirit upon those who stood around, that their eyes might be opened, that they might see how to follow Acatia on her bright path.

Then he broke the bread and ate a portion, and gave the remainder unto Balus and Acatia.

"I think of the body that was broken for me," whispered Acatia, as she partook of the bread.

So also Balus.

Likewise they drank of the wine, all three from one cup, and reminded each other that it was a symbol of His Blood poured out from the cross, for the redemption of man.

A profound pause succeeded this ceremony, for a Divine presence seemed to consecrate the chamber. It was felt by all—by those who had partaken of the sacrament, and by the witnesses. Even the practical Paulinus

had a sense of awe. He stirred uncomfortably, and would fain have broken the silence, but his tongue appeared to cleave to the roof of his mouth.

Suddenly the spell was broken by Acatia. She stretched forth her arms, and exclaimed with a loud voice :—

"What is this, O Fabian? I see heaven opened. I see the throne of God, and before the throne is a sea of glass mingled with fire. I hear the angels making music on their golden harps. What a glorious city is the city of God! The walls are of jasper stone, the streets of pure gold; and out of the city flows the river of life. The redeemed are arrayed in white robes and have palms in their hands, and they sing, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.' Yonder, O Fabian, is Jesus crowned with many crowns.'

Her head sank back upon the shoulder of Quintilia as she uttered the last words, and

with an expression that illumined her countenance with a supernatural beauty, she hid her face in the bosom of her sister. Then she gently slid away in a sleep through the open portals of eternity.

CHAPTER III.

THE BURIAL OF ACATIA.

IOPE gathered flowers in the garden of Laurentum, and a little maid, the youngest of the orphans of Sulpitius, received them in her outspread tunica.

The pretty child was already overloaded with her fragrant burden, but still Iope added to the heap.

"I will bury thee, O Flavia," said she, laughing merrily.

"Thou canst not," replied the little Flavia bravely, and she stood firm; but nevertheless there came a slight expression of alarm over the pretty round face, for the child's feet were almost concealed by the flowers fallen

around, and she could only see with difficulty through the branch of myrtle which was the last contribution.

"What shall we do when Flavia is buried?" cried a voice behind a shrub, and suddenly there appeared the speaker, another of the orphans, grasping in her arms a bunch of tall white lilies.

"We will hang garlands on her tomb," replied Iope gravely,—"garlands wet with dewdrops that will look like tears; and then we will all sit down in a circle and sing a beautiful mournful dirge."

Little Flavia dropped the flowers which she held, and fled suddenly. She knew well enough that Iope and her sister were only teasing her, but she was a sensitive child.

"Chase her! chase her!" exclaimed one of the orphans, who was in an arbour close by, within hearing of all that had passed.

"It will be better than following a butterfly. We will chase her, and while we are gone Iope shall make a grave of the flowers. She shall pile them all up in a circle and leave a space for the victim in the middle—a space for Flavia. That will be an exeellent game. We will bring back Flavia and lay her in the grave ; and if she struggles and screams, the greater will be the amusement. The more the Christians resisted and cried in the arena, the better pleased were the spectators. Away! away! we will pretend Flavia is a Christian, and we will fetch her out of her hiding-place and bring her hither and bury her. Away! away!"

"No, no!" remonstrated Iope. But it was too late : the orphans were gone, every one of them, and she was left alone.

"Well, well, it is no matter," thought the young Greek ; "the little one is doubtless safe with Valaria." And she sat down

beside the heap of flowers to weave a garland for the shrine of Flora.

Intent upon her graceful work, she did not perceive the approach of Plotinus.

The philosopher advanced with his usual serenity and stateliness of gait. There was nothing in his countenance to indicate the sad errand which had directed him thither, and when Iope saw him she was greeted with the familiar salutation, the familiar smile. His abrupt appearance did not startle her or raise a question in her mind, for the philosopher was accustomed to come and go at unexpected moments.

When the salutations were exchanged, Iope resumed her floral employment, and the philosopher, leaning against the trunk of an aged tree, seemed to watch the movements of her busy fingers.

Plotinus had not hesitated to inform Valaria of Acatia's death immediately on his

arrival at the villa of Quintilius. He knew that the widow was expecting the event, and that the preparations for the reception of the body, which was to be placed in a cave at the further end of the garden, would blunt the edge of her grief, but he dreaded the effect of the revelation upon Iope.

Thus he stood gazing down upon her, loth to bring a cloud over her bright thoughts, waiting for something to give him a key which was fitted to unlock the floodgates of her childlike and passionate sorrow.

Meanwhile, he fell into a deep reverie, and wondered, as he had often done, at the mystery of life and death. "Men," he thought, "cling to this corporeal life as if the soul were in freedom and not in fetters. To lose it they reckon the greatest of calamities, and yet surely it must be joy to be released from these sensuous bonds.

And those who have pleasure in life, those who do not wish to die, are taken away, while those that are weary of life are left to struggle on. Acatia might have enjoyed the world for many years to come, and she would have added to the enjoyment of life by her friends now bereaved, and whose pleasures are lessened by her absence. Was she too good for earth, or was her banishment from the presence of the gods brief because her sins were few? Who can tell? We cannot penetrate into the divine mysteries. I saw the youthful Gordianus lie bleeding on the Philippian fields. I saw the prudent Misitheus cut off when his wisdom was most needed for the support of the empire. I saw Quintilius and his wife laid low, and their children left orphans. And now Acatia is dead. The best die first, and we are left to mourn and lament. We feel the agony of the loss of them, though our loss

must be their gain. Acatia is gone to the bosom of God."

Iope observed her guardian from time to time with an amused smile. She thought him more than usually thoughtful, and began to make conjectures as to the cause. At length innocent mischief suggested that she should distract his attention. She lifted a row of little white lily bells suspended on a slender stem and held them towards him.

"These," said she, "are for Acatia."

Plotinus was instantly awakened from his reverie. He sat down by the side of the young Greek and took her hand.

"Have you considered, O Iope," he replied, "that your gift will fade?"

"All things fade," answered Iope, looking sadly at her lilies.

"And all things die," added Plotinus. "Little one, is it worth while to weep over that which is natural?"

Iope looked at him with eyes full of astonishment.

"No," she answered; "but many cannot help it."

"It is natural to lose our friends," said Plotinus thoughtfully. "If I tell you that you have lost a friend, O Iope, will you weep?"

"Ah, surely, for I love my friends."

"Iope, you have lost a friend."

The young Greek dropped the lilies and clasped her hands together upon her bosom.

"Acatia?" she cried, in a voice full of alarm; "Acatia?"

Plotinus was silent.

The tears darted into Iope's eyes, and she cast herself towards the philosopher in an agony of grief. "Tell me," said she, with difficulty, "is Acatia dead?"

"Dead," echoed Plotinus.

Iope flung herself upon the ground among

the scattered flowers, and wept like a passionate child.

Plotinus was disturbed. He knew not what to do. Presently he lifted the slight form of the maiden and set her upon a marble bench, but she still wept, leaning her head against his shoulder. Wondering at the violence of her sorrow, Plotinus soothed her as best he could, and waited until she should be exhausted.

So Valaria found them.

Ten minutes later Iope was sleeping quietly on her own couch with a tear-drop hanging on her eyelashes, and she had not awakened when the solemn procession of the dead entered the garden.

Fabian and Balus had accompanied the sorrowing Quintilia to Laurentum. She had urged the aged bishop to remain in Rome, but he answered, "The same Lord who gave Jacob strength to journey into Egypt after

he was an hundred years old will support me by the way, and I would fain see with mine own eyes the resting-place of this lamb." Aulus Camillus was also with the mourners, but the sacred office of Laberius prohibited his presence in the vicinity of a corpse. "Nevertheless," he said to Quintilia as he bade her farewell before her departure to Laurentum, "my spirit will be with thee; I shall see the burial of my sister in the mirror of imagination." Then he besought Quintilia to return to the house of Paulinus, and she promised so to do.

At eventide Acatia was carried to the place where the ashes of her parents were preserved. A natural cave formed the sepulchre of Quintilius. At the death of his young and beautiful wife he had caused it to be converted into a receptacle for his beloved dead. There they had often sat and talked, and listened, hand in hand, to

the murmur of the sea. Never more could such sweet happiness be had within that shelter, and therefore he would hallow it with all that remained of his treasure—a few gray ashes in a little golden urn. This urn was mounted on a silver tripod placed upon a marble altar in the very centre of the cave. Vivid representations of the deceased, engaged in various domestic employments, were frescoed on the four sides of the altar, and over the urn was suspended a marble dove with outspread wings, having in its beak a tablet recording the name and virtues of the dead. The ashes of Quintilius were deposited beside those of his wife, and around the sides of the cave were niches destined for the reception of his family. Several of the niches were of sufficient length to accommodate a dozen urns, and one of them had been prepared for the reception of Acatia. Dying a Christian, she

had desired to be buried as a Christian, and therefore her friends, acceding to her wish, had caused her body to be embalmed.

Quintilia, Valaria, and the half-frightened Iope, shrouded in white garments, awaited the arrival of the dead by the open door of the sepulchre, and near them stood Plotinus, a spectator rather than an actor in the ceremony which was about to take place.

Slowly, very slowly, the solemn procession advanced down the long winding path towards the sepulchre. The aged Fabian, leaning upon the strong arm of his nephew Balus, walked first. His head was uncovered, and the thin locks of his silvery hair and his long beard were bestirred by a gentle breeze. His wrinkled face was full of serenity, and he lifted his eyes to the heavens whence came his light. Now he moved his lips as though he prayed, and now he seemed to be listening intently to

the pious ejaculations of his deacon, uttered in a loud, earnest voice, for the encouragement of Christians and the edification of all who knew not Christ. They were followed by a small company of believers out of the neighbourhood, who carried Acatia in an open litter covered by a linen cloth, and by Aulus Camillus, looking strangely uncomfortable in his mourning garments.

The white figures of the women, and the tall, dark-robed form of the philosopher, directed the bearers whither to carry their sacred burden. On, on they moved, making no lamentation. "We ought not," said Fabian, "to mourn for those who are delivered from the world by the call of the Lord, since we know that they are not lost but sent before us, that they have taken their leave of us in order to precede us. We may long after them as we do for those who have sailed on a distant voyage, but

we do not lament them. We may not here, below, put on dark robes of mourning when they have already put on the white robe of glory. We may not give the heathen any just occasion to accuse us of weeping for those who they say are lost and extinct, but of whom we say that *they live with God.* We do not fail to prove by the witness of our hearts the faith we confess with our lips. We who live in hope, who believe in God and trust that Christ has suffered for us and risen again, why do we not ourselves wish to depart out of this world; or why do we lament for the friends who have been separated from us as if they were lost, when Christ our Lord and God exhorts us, saying, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die"? Why are we not in haste to see our

country and home, to greet our elders? There await us a multitude of those whom we love—fathers, brothers, and children, who are secure already of their own safety and concerned only for ours. What mutual joy to them and to us when we come into their presence and into their embrace!"

The bearers set down the corpse close by the entrance to the sepulchre, and Plotinus stepping forward gently removed the covering which concealed the face of the dead.

Acatia lay like one asleep. Her head was pillowed easily upon her favourite cushion, and the tint of life was on her cheeks. It was difficult to believe that no breath passed between her parted lips, and that the beautiful smile which illuminated her countenance was not evoked by a vision of angels. She was shrouded in the garment which she wore at her baptism, and her hands were crossed meekly upon her bosom.

Plotinus gazed upon her with a dreamy expression in his eyes, his arms folded upon his breast, his head lowered, as though he did reverence in the awful presence of death.

A burst of hysterical weeping broke the spell which seemed to have fallen upon the assembly. Iope could control herself no longer. Camillus led her away, and Valaria anxiously entreated Fabian to proceed with the ceremony, that she might be at liberty to follow.

The aged bishop, with his eyes half-closed, had been listening to voices not of this earth. He started at the voice of the widow.

"Pray," whispered Balus; and he lifted up his voice.

"O Lord," he said, "we thank Thee for taking the soul of Thy daughter into Thy bosom. We do not lament her departure, for we know that she hath but gone before

into the paradise which Thou hast promised as the portion of Thy redeemed. Thou hast gratified her heart's desire. Thou hast shown unto her Thy countenance, and"—pointing to Acatia—"she smiles. Her mortal features faintly reflect the expression which is upon her bright, immortal face. Standing before Thee, looking upon Thee, upon Thy glory, and upon those who are around Thy throne, she rejoices with an exceeding great joy. O great God, she hath received her reward: soon—soon, it seemeth unto us; but Thy will be done. I am old, and I shall very quickly depart. These Thy children will, ere long, discover that the gulf which separates them from the eternal world is but a narrow passage. So prepare us that we may pass through the valley of the shadow of death as she hath done. Pure and holy was her life, pure and holy may be the remainder of ours. If we

suffer, may we suffer without repining, even as she did. Yea, Lord, though the sword of persecution should descend upon us once more, may we suffer with patience, and may we die, if such be Thy will, steadfast in the faith, remembering that our blood is the seed of the Church. What is death that we should dread its grasp? Nothing, but the shadow of the gate which opens into eternal life. Christians fixing their eyes upon the light which is shed from heaven pass unconsciously through it. Acatia, all our friends who have died, have but gone from our gaze for a moment. Let us therefore make no lament when the arrow of death strikes down one of our little company, for it but adds another to the company which awaits us above. Moreover, it is commanded that we weep not for the dead, but for the living. *Vale*, Acatia! Bearers, take her up, and bury our dead out of our sight."

As soon as the last words were spoken the body of Acatia was gently shrouded from head to foot in the purple pall upon which it had been lying, the linen coverlid was wrapped around it, and it was tenderly deposited in the niche prepared for its reception.

The company of Christians who had attended the ceremony then formed a solemn semicircle before the sepulchre and began to sing in a low-toned chant a funeral hymn which had been written by Fabian :—

Let sorrows cease, and cease our cares ;
A robe of light our sister wears ;
Before the throne of God she stands,
A palm of vict'ry in her hands.

Her life was brief, her joys were few
Until the truth in Christ she knew ;
Then in her soul eternal light
Dispersed the darkness and the night.

The faithful Shepherd of the sheep,
Who o'er His flock doth vigil keep,
Our sister called ; she knew His voice,
It made her trembling heart rejoice.

"Thou art My sheep," she heard Him say;
"For thee I did the ransom pay;
Within My book thy name I read,
Then come and in My pastures feed."

And now we lay her with the dead,
Her soul from earth to heav'n is fled;
With Him she loves, her sufferings o'er,
She hath true joys for evermore.

Upon her grave the flowers we strew.
Where she has gone we too shall go,
And, palms of vict'ry in our hands,
Shall stand where now our sister stands.

As the last note died away a slave entered with a basket of flowers,—the flowers which had been gathered to adorn the shrine of Flora,—and each member of the company dipped in a hand, lifted a few, and deposited them in the niche where Acatia reposed. Then they passed out of the cave and left the mourners alone.

"*In pace*," wrote Plotinus with his stylus on the wall beneath.

"In peace leavest thou me," exclaimed Quintilia, falling upon her knees.

CHAPTER IV.

DECIUS EMPEROR.

"WHAT a strange rumbling in the bowels of the earth!" exclaimed the sentinel at the Esquiline Gate, as he looked out of his sentry-box to inquire the cause with a vague feeling of terror. He had been on the point of falling asleep, and was half-disposed to think that Jupiter had discovered his inclination and was coming to punish him. It was still dark, but flashes of lightning continually illuminated the heavens, darting from side to side with a zig-zag motion which was excessively alarming, accompanied by terrific claps of thunder. The strange noise which had startled the sentinel was a

movement of the earth, which could only be compared to that of a mighty hand shaking the foundations of the seven hills.

The trembling sentinel longed earnestly for the light, but there still remained some hours before the dawn. Stepping out of his shelter, he stood in the beating rain, and listened eagerly for some indications of life. It was not long before he heard several citizens shouting, "The earthquake! the earthquake! run for your lives!"

But the sentinel did not stir; he felt that the ground was again stationary, and he saw signs of an abatement of the storm.

"I wonder what this portends," he thought, recovering his equanimity. "There was an earthquake before the fall of Gordianus, and some great disturbance of the elements has always been the herald of misfortune to Rome or her emperors. The gods do not leave us long in peace. If we

are not divided against ourselves, shedding each other's blood, and bringing down sorrow upon our own heads, famine or pestilence stalks across the land, and cuts us down by hundreds. Woe to us! we live in evil days."

The forebodings of the sentinel seemed to be shared by all the citizens. Scarcely had the light dawned before they were to be seen hurrying in all directions, crying out that the earthquake had made the Tiber flow backward, and that dreadful appearances had been descried in the heavens,—warriors brandishing spears, with their garments dyed in blood, certain indication of evil to descend in some form upon the imperial city. The people rushed to the temples as soon as they were open, anxious to propitiate the angry gods with a sacrifice, and processions of priests paraded the streets with incense and lustrations.

In the midst of the excitement a horseman was seen hastening towards the city with a speed which distinguished him as the bearer of important news. He rode towards the palace of the Cæsars, disregarding the cries and questions of the multitude who followed at his heels, and never drew rein until he reached its gates.

An hour later the Senate, hastily convoked, was sitting, and the Emperor, pale and fierce, made known the tidings which had been brought. They spoke of treachery and treason. Marinus, sent against the Goths, had been proclaimed Emperor.

By treachery and bloodshed Philip the Arabian had ascended the throne of the Cæsars, and he might well dread his own deposition and the elevation of his successor by similar means. But the arrow had been directed from an unexpected quarter, and he was deeply smitten. "Marinus was my most

trusted friend," he exclaimed. "Sooner had I anticipated the fall of Rome than the deceit of Marinus. God of integrity! hast thou no real devotee? If I cannot trust the man who has given me so many tokens of attachment, who went away to vanquish my enemies with such assurances of adherence to my cause, in whom shall I believe? Roman senators, lend me your aid! Advise me how to punish this traitor for his baseness. In a council of Romans wisdom must prevail."

The senators were silent. A spirit of perplexity and gloom pervaded the assembly. They had no love for Philip, but they saw nothing promising in the prospect of a new contention for the empire. Fear seemed to possess every mind, and the attitude of all present was one of profound thought. The silence deepened, and the imperial Philip moved impatiently upon his throne. He

glanced angrily around. Suddenly the spell was broken.

Decius arose. All knew the wisdom and valour of Decius. Each noble Roman disposed himself more comfortably on his marble bench, and bent forward to hear the words of the orator.

"O most august Emperor," said Decius, "most noble senators! Let us not fear Marinus! The gods hate treachery, and will not suffer it to go unpunished. Man in grasping at power forgets the eternal justice which rules the world. But he cannot forget it long. The handful of soldiers who have invested him with the purple are but a feeble support to his assumed dignity. Let him play the monarch if he will. He is but the actor in a scene which will terminate in a tragedy. His men of war and the legions of Illyricum will soon end all, as capricious in their favours as in their frowns."

And so it was. In a few days the soldiers in Thrace put Marinus to death.

A new leader was now required for the army in Thrace, and the imperial choice naturally devolved upon the man who had predicted the downfall of Marinus.

"O wise and noble senator!" said Philip to Decius, "who can fill this difficult position with greater prudence than thou? Conquer the Goths, subdue the Scythians, enjoy the triumph of a warrior who has saved his country, and rule the land which by your courage you have made ours!"

The city was once more restored to tranquility. Nothing was to be feared from a few barbarians invading a distant province, and when Decius with a reinforcement for the Roman army had departed on his errand, their very existence was forgotten. The Emperor, the senators, and the patricians returned to their usual employments.

Frivolity and licentiousness again reigned in the city. It was only very serious persons who remembered the portents of evil, or had any thoughts about the future.

Among the most prominent of these was Balus the deacon. His voice was heard resounding in all the public places, making Rome echo with the awful words of the Apocalypse on the doom of mighty Babylon; but he was noticed only as an enthusiast, the mark for a stone, or pitied as a poor lunatic, who would be better placed under control. But many of a less excitable disposition indulged the sentiments which he was thundering, and Plotinus mysteriously discoursed about the speedy descent of an avenging spirit, earnestly entreating his hearers to avert the flaming sword of the angry gods, by helping to establish the city of refuge—his new Republic.

The physician Paulinus, as he was carried

in his lectica through the various parts of the city, often meditated on the serious condition of Rome. He saw with dismay the increase of sensuality among the rich, and the rapid spread of wretchedness, filth, and fever among the poor. Bravely he fought against the evil, sparing neither means nor strength; but all his efforts, though more practical than those of Plotinus, were vain struggles against an invincible monster. Recognising this fact, Paulinus was wont to groan and mutter to himself, "The world rots! the world rots! We must be content to let it die! All we can do is to give it a decent burial."

One day, as he drew near to the Mons Appius, he heard the voice of Balus resounding over the house-tops. The enthusiastic deacon was standing on a great boulder which was lodged on the slope of the hill, bewailing, as was his custom, the hopeless

condition of the Roman people. He was surrounded by a multitude of persons, for his eloquence and his energy never failed to secure him an audience, although his subject and his earnestness did not seem to make much visible impression.

Paulinus stepped out of his lectica and approached the spot, desirous of hearing what was being said by the Christian orator.

"I tell thee again the last days are come!" exclaimed Balus. "Laugh you may, scoff you may! The people laughed when Noe foretold a flood, and while they were laughing the rain fell, the waters rose, and swept them off the face of the earth. Lo, Christ comes! 'There are signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after

those things which are coming on the earth : for the powers of heaven are shaken.' The city is doomed to destruction! Come out of her, O my people, and be not partakers of her plagues! The world is in the agonies of dissolution."

"Or in the throes of a new birth," said a voice, but the speaker was nowhere to be seen.

The next moment all the multitude were scattered abroad. Some one had whispered that a message had arrived from the east, and all were hurrying towards the Palace or the Forum to inquire the truth of the report.

Balus cast the corner of his toga over his shoulder and walked thoughtfully away, for in the rumour so suddenly circulated he fancied he saw an indication of the fulfilment of his prophecies.

Paulinus returned to his lectica and went to the house of a senator whom he expected

to find preparing for a banquet. But the banquet was postponed because the senator had been summoned to attend the Emperor, who was raging like a madman in his palace, making the marble hills echo with his oaths. Decius had been invested with the purple by the very soldiers who had elevated his predecessor, aided by the legions which had accompanied him from Rome.

"Not by my will," he wrote to Philip, "and so will I show thee hereafter. The legions of Mysia left me only the alternative of death or the purple. Be content to let me have the empty title; when I return to Rome I will resign the imperial ornaments and return to my allegiance as thy most obedient subject."

"I will not trust him!" exclaimed Philip fiercely. "Never more will I trust man. Call together all my legions in Rome, and I

will lead them against the traitor. By the God of Vengeance I will crush the serpent beneath my heel!"

Two hours later Aulus Camillus rode post haste to Laurentum. He was appointed to the command of one of the imperial legions, and must bid Iope farewell.

The young Greek maiden, unconscious of the cloud which was lowering over her head, was seated in the peristylium with Valaria, and the widow was teaching Iope the use of the shuttle.

"The Roman matrons weave all their garments and the drapery of their houses," said Valaria, disposing the fine web in a more convenient form; "and the quality of their taste is displayed in the design. Thou hast seen that beautiful arras in the Palace. It is the work of the imperial Severa and her maidens. I would have chosen a more cheerful subject for representation,—a dance

of nymphs or a scene of love,—but our Empress is of a melancholy disposition."

"What shall be our design?" inquired Iope, as she placed the stay according to the instructions of Valaria.

The widow drew a small roll of papyrus out of her bosom, and unfolded it with an air of mystery.

"What think you?" said she. "Well I know, O little one, that thou hast no stability—a butterfly may allure thee from thy task, and so I have secured a spell which will enchain thee to thy work. Behold!"

She held up the little roll of papyrus, and displayed a picture of Camillus in the character of Orpheus seeking Eurydice.

Iope clapped her hands with delight.

"I will not rest," said she, "until the tapestry is woven."

As she spoke, Aulus Camillus himself appeared upon the threshold.

He was clad in armour, because he had arranged to meet the army of Philip upon the road. Nothing but his shield and sword were wanting to complete his accoutrements for war. These had been sent forward by his armour-bearer.

Iope uttered a scream of surprise and fear. She did not recognise her lover in his unusual dress, and was alarmed at the appearance of an armed man in their secluded abode.

"It is Camillus," said Valaria, repelling the tears which started into her eyes, for the soldier's widow instantly guessed the meaning of that abrupt visit in such apparel. So had come her own noble husband before he went with Gordianus.

"Iope!" exclaimed Camillus, removing his helmet and tossing it aside.

Iope flew like a fawn into the shelter of his open arms, and rested her warm cheek

against the cold steel which covered his breast. Her fears all fled in a moment, and the future gave her no trouble. She thought only of the present. He was there, and she was happy. She did not even question why he wore armour when the first surprise at seeing him arrayed therein had passed away.

How would he break the dreadful news to her, and how would she bear it?

This was Valaria pondering as she rose silently and slid out of the peristylium, with her heart heavy and her tears no longer under control.

In the atrium she met the slave who had attended Aulus Camillus, and learnt from him the cause of the war.

"Alas, Severa!" she exclaimed, wringing her hands; "the invisible trouble which thy sad eyes have always seemed to behold is now becoming apparent unto us. Alas,

Severa! what dark trials are in store for thee! Who would be an Empress at such a cost?"

She hurried into the garden and bade the orphans of Sulpitius hie away to the hills in search of wild flowers. She commanded all the slaves into a distant part of the villa, and then kept jealous watch around the peristylium, lest the sad parting of the lovers should be interrupted. Now and again she was startled from her reveries by a muffled sound of sobbing.

"The lightning doth not so much damage when the rain falls," thought Valaria.

There came also the low murmur of voices. These were suddenly silenced in a manner that alarmed the anxious widow.

With bated breath she listened for the next movement, and when she heard it not she stirred as though she would inquire the cause.

"Valaria!"

Her name was called with a sharp accent that denoted pain and alarm.

The widow hurried into the peristylium, and received the insensible form of Iope into her arms.

"She could not bear it when I went to tear myself away," said Camillus hoarsely; "but the gods are merciful. They would spare her the end. Comfort her, Valaria. Farewell."

"She shall be comforted," said Valaria, almost choked by her sobs.

He kissed the hand of the widow and pressed a passionate kiss upon the cold lips of Iope. Down fell the tears over his manly cheeks upon her white face, but he sought not to check them now, because she could not see them. Then he snatched up his helmet and strove to smile as he settled it upon his head; but he could not—he could

not with that weight upon his breast. How would it ever be removed? Dashing out of the peristylium, nodding his waving plumes to the martial sound of his rattling armour, he sprang upon his snorting horse, and spurred with fury in the direction of Rome.

CHAPTER V.

QUINTILIA'S CONVERSION.

"IN peace thou leavest me" were the last words of Quintilia as she left her sister's grave. She had the peace of a Christian but there had been a struggle before it came. For long nights and weary days she had nursed her dying sister, and had often wondered at the calm resignation which was produced by faith in Christ. She had tried to explain it sometimes as resulting from the nature of the disease and sometimes as a stoical submission to inevitable fate, but as she reflected again, she felt that her explanations were insufficient. Acatia had within her a well-spring of joy which made all her suffering seem but a light affliction.

As Fabian and Balus were both frequent visitors by the sister's sick bed, Quintilia had many opportunities of hearing the Scriptures read, and of conversing about their meaning. She had always been attracted by the character of Christ, but difficulties sprang up on every side which prevented her reason being satisfied. "What," she would say to herself, "do I know of these books, who wrote them, or when were they written?" And the possibility of ever knowing these things with certainty was utterly hopeless. There was indeed a Christian community which had the care of these books, but it could say little more about them than that it possessed them.

On one occasion Fabian surprised Quintilia sitting by the bedside of her sister, full of these thoughts. His discernment instantly discovered the cause of her unusual preoccupation, and he determined to lighten

the burden if it were possible. "My daughter," he said, drawing near to her softly and speaking in a low tone, "Acatia sleeps; come into yonder recess where our conversation will not disturb her, and tell me what is in thy mind. There is no healing a disease without first knowing it, there is no finding truth but by seeking it honestly. We should conceal nothing even from ourselves. There are many things which we do not and cannot know, and as such they should be recognised. We have certain books, and they speak of One who was the perfection of human nature. We feel it. What do we want more? God has realized our ideal and has shown us that we may each realize it for ourselves. We have the main fact. If further details had been necessary we should have had them."

"True, O Fabian," said Quintilia, who had been listening attentively; "but if Christianity

is a special revelation to man, why is it not more generally known? We cannot well say that the fault is man's, for if we saw it as plainly as we see the sun, and if its truth were as certain as that two and two are four, all men would be Christians."

"Do not find fault with God's way, O Quintilia," answered the aged bishop. "Rather examine it, and when you have understood it you will find that it is better than man's way. What we desire and what God gives us are never entirely the same. We do not know why, but here is the fact. We came into the world destitute and ignorant. To get knowledge, yea even to get clothing, we must make some efforts. And so it is with what is revealed. We must inquire after it, labour to find it, and we must not be disappointed if everything is not done in the way we expected."

"I am willing," said Quintilia, "to admit

that there may be things which I do not understand, and that God may reveal Himself otherwise than I suppose He would. Yet I expect something which I do understand, for my reason demands a reason before I can assent even to renounce reasoning. To be a Christian I am required to believe that for centuries the truth was known only to a few Jews shut up in an obscure country, while the great civilized nations of the earth were groping in darkness."

"And yet," answered Fabian, "it is not more difficult than to believe that the whole world was left in darkness, and this is the only other alternative; that God chose a family and then a nation to preserve, or rather to be the means of restoring to the world the knowledge of Himself, is not hard to believe. Expressly for this reason the Jews were chosen, and whatever may have

been their failings, this end they accomplished. The knowledge which God gave the Jews and which they preserved for centuries, has now been proclaimed to all nations by the Apostles of Christ."

"And this nation," answered Quintilia, "which preserved the knowledge of God, rejected the Christ of whose Apostles you speak. Surely they had the best means of knowing if Jesus of Nazareth was their promised Messiah."

"It is, O Quintilia, the heart that discerns moral truths," said Fabian. "The Jews in Christ's time were not patterns of simplicity and sincerity. Their minds were blinded by prejudice. They had misunderstood their own mission, and no marvel that they misunderstood Christ's mission. The veil is still upon the heart of the children of Israel."

"But, O my Fabian," said Quintilia,

"what evidence did this Jesus give to the Jews that He was the Christ?"

"He worked miracles," said Fabian, "and in Him the prophecies were fulfilled."

"Miracles," exclaimed Quintilia. "What evidence have we that He wrought miracles? We did not see them, and we have had no opportunities of testing the witnesses. The founders of all religions have professed to work miracles. Roman history is full of them, and what are they when examined with a searching eye?"

"True, O Quintilia," said Fabian, "we did not see the miracles, but the Jews saw them. They believed the miracles, yet they did not believe in Christ."

"People are not always consistent," answered Quintilia, rather perplexed by what had just been said, and half-perceiving that the Jews erred through prejudice; but recalling some words in Deuteronomy, she

asked if the Jews had not been forbidden to listen to any prophet who taught them to go after other gods, even though he wrought signs and wonders.

"True again, O Quintilia," said Fabian; "but Jesus did not set forth other gods. All His words were truth, and true men felt that He was true. The mere working of miracles would not have proved anything, for those who saw the miracles might have been deceived, and it is true we have only the records of them; but when we have known Christ in our hearts, when we have felt the power of what He taught them, we can believe that He did mighty works, and that the Jews were not justified in rejecting Him. Moreover, the old prophets of the Jews had spoken of a Mighty One that was to come. He was to be of the root of Jesse, who was the father of David, and through Him the Gentiles were to come to the light

which previously had only been given to the Jews. A Messiah to come is the burden of the Old Testament, and in Jesus of Nazareth the promises were fulfilled."

"And still I wonder," said Quintilia, "why the Jews did not see in Jesus their promised Christ. This surely was a matter for the intellect more than for the heart. They had the words of their prophets, and whether or not Jesus answered to them was a question as easily settled as a trial in a court of justice. But scarcely one of the prophecies in the Old Testament professes to refer immediately and directly to Christ. They have generally another meaning, and when I take those quoted in the New Testament and introduced with the words 'that it might be fulfilled,' I find that the words quoted are merely brought in as the verification of a saying or proverb. I cannot see in prophecy a convincing

evidence that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Jews."

"It is true, O Quintilia, that the principle of quotation in the New Testament is often the mere accommodation of words to a new meaning, and so I admit that in a court of law they would not stand the required test of being direct evidence. The Scriptures have not the strict formality of legal documents. But there is a spirit running through them which answers to the spirit within us, and we see a mighty plan unfolded the more we look into the heart of the Scriptures. Had the Jews been unprejudiced they could have seen in Jesus the Christ, the Son of David. Yet I marvel not that they rejected Him. It was only what we expect in the main from man as he now is. It was in accordance with the general conduct of the Jewish people as recorded in their own Scriptures. God had nourished and

brought up children, and they rebelled against Him. We do not expect any truth to win its way in the world all at once. The Gospel must have time to make its triumphs. Men are bent on their pleasures, they are blinded by prejudices, and they are too indolent to allow their minds to be disturbed by any questions that affect traditional beliefs."

At this moment the voice of Acatia interrupted the conversation, and Quintilia arose from her seat and went softly to see what was required. A few moments later the old bishop was kneeling by the side of the dying maiden, with his hands folded and his eyes raised in prayer.

Quintilia listened to the solemn words which were uttered, and thought over the serious conversation which she had just had with the reverend man who spoke.

She saw reason in what Fabian had said, but she was far from being convinced.

There was no point on which she could fasten and feel that here she was safe. And the time had not come when the truth was so to possess her that she could not help believing. But it did come. The death of her sister cleared away the remainder of the veil which shut out the full light from her mind. She no longer sought evidence of the truth of Christianity. She felt that it was true. As deep answers unto deep, so the divine within her answered to the divine in Christ. Thus she was not left comfortless when Acatia departed.

CHAPTER VI.

A BLOW TO LELA.

THE ides of the next month had not arrived, when a great crowd was seen rushing towards the Imperial Forum.

"What is it?" inquired Balus, who had just been preaching in one of the by-streets.

"Philip is dead," was the reply. "He lieth dead at Verona. Incensed at his overbearing conduct towards them, his own soldiers have slain him. His little son is also dead. He was massacred by the Pretorian Guards as soon as they knew what had happened, and the Empress Severa is said to have shared the same fate. Alas for the

sad-eyed Severa! but who will lament the Arabian? By treachery he ascended the throne, and by treachery he fell: such is the justice of the gods."

"Hath a new Emperor been chosen?" asked Balus.

"Of a certainty," was the answer. "Doth not another ever spring Phœnix-like from the ashes of the last? The soldiers cried, 'Hail, Decius Imperator!' long before Philip was cold. Come away to the Forum and hear him proclaimed. The wise senate know his good qualities, and are determined to ratify the election of the soldiers before his return.—Decius Augustus!"

The heart of the deacon seemed to stand still for a moment, and then it beat violently.

A new Emperor promised new life to the Empire and a restoration of the ancient manners of the Roman people; but the

Christians had cause to dread the change. They were not ignorant of the estimable qualities of Decius and his ability for government, but experience had taught them that the best Emperors were not always their best friends. Of late years, when the Emperors were either indifferent or too much occupied with other subjects, their number had increased, and they were now an element of conflict in the Empire. Other men might have ceased to believe in the gods and to attend the public services of religion, but the Christians did more than this. They were open enemies. Their objection to the worship of the gods was not to be overcome, and so their increase was the increase of the spirit of revolution, which if allowed to go on would soon change the aspect of Rome; it would be Rome no more. Decius held this view of Christianity, and in all his public offices he had shown no

favour to those who had embraced the new doctrine.

Balus thought that there were probably evil days in store for the Church, as he listened to the proclamation which was received with loud acclamations by the populace. So also thought all the Christians who were in the crowd, and scarcely had the herald ceased speaking before they quietly withdrew to consult over their future.

Balus likewise left the Forum, but he muffled himself in his cloak to avoid the recognitions of his anxious brethren, and deftly avoiding all whom he met, hurried towards the house of Fabian.

His heart was heavy with forebodings, and he felt that he could not rest until he had told his uncle, the aged bishop, what he had heard.

But he was destined to administer comfort before he received it.

As he entered an unfrequented street, he was met by a shrouded female, hurrying forward in a manner which betokened great agitation of mind. When she perceived the deacon she began to run, and was soon standing before him with her hand upon his arm.

"O Balus!" said she, "this is a fortunate meeting; I was about to seek thee at the house of Fabian."

The voice, though sharpened and changed by some strong emotion, was easily recognised as that of Lela; but the dancer did not desire to be known only by its tones. She lifted a corner of her palla and showed the deacon a face white as that of one dead, with large wild eyes full of tears that would not fall.

Lela has changed her character since we saw her at the banquet of Bromius the Sophist. No longer doth she dance for her subsistence, and it is probable that she will

never dance again. The last note of her gay melodies has sounded, and henceforward the little harp is consecrated to express the real feelings of its owner's heart. Sad they are, and in mournful music do they find a voice. Oft at the mystic hour which is beloved by wandering Melancholy, the dancer sets her troubled thoughts to wild rhythms, but she loves best to chant her sorrows when the bright moon, enthroned on funeral clouds, shines solitary, no star astir in her blue court, no breeze afloat, no sound of bird or rill or leaf. The moon has always seemed to Lela like a friend who pitied her misfortunes, and from her childhood she has stolen forth to weep in its white light. But now she seeks no more her favourite haunts. Leaving her chamber with a noiseless tread, she flits up a long flight of marble steps to gaze at the mysterious, thoughtful queen who watches

with mournful serenity the earth beneath. Resting her harp upon the parapet of the broad roof which gives her shelter, she touches its strings and tells her grief, till there comes one who takes her in warm arms and speaks the words which the white moon seems ever going to utter,—one who feels for her when her heart is sad, and allures her by many sweet words of sympathy to change the melancholy complaining of her harp into a hymn of resignation.

Soon after the funeral of Acatia the mother of Lela died suddenly, and the alarmed dancer instantly ran to the house of Paulinus, where she was detained by Quintilia while the physician went to inquire into the cause of the unexpected decease of the sick woman, and to make arrangements for her burial. Calvus, as usual, was standing on the threshold of his rotten portico, and no sooner did he see Paulinus than he cried

out gleefully, "Lela is rid of her burden, and shall now be made to listen to my suit."

The physician answered not a word; but as he mounted the old stairs to look at the dead woman he determined to thwart the purpose of the brutal ironsmith.

So Lela became an inmate of the physician's house, and was handmaid to Quintilia, who comforted her in her solitude, and, by accounts of Acatia's death, unconsciously sowed the seeds of Christianity in her mind.

Lela very soon recognised in Christ the God whom Plotinus sought, and a few interviews with Fabian and Balus established her faith. Like Acatia, she was unable to reason, but she felt the truth of what she heard, and that was enough for her simple soul. Every day appeared to add strength to her belief, and before long all the emotions

which had agitated her bosom apparently became calm under its influence.

But to return to the unfrequented street.

"I cannot speak to thee here," said Lela to Balus, looking around with a suspicious glance. "I fear an interruption; let us withdraw into yonder passage. I know it is seldom used."

She tightened her grasp on the arm of the deacon, as though she feared a denial; but Balus had no desire to refuse her request. He instantly moved in the direction she indicated with her finger.

As soon as they were standing in the passage, Lela said, with a voice broken by a choking sensation in her throat, "Balus, come with me to the house of Paulinus and help me to tell Quintilia the news which I have heard."

"Doubtless she is already acquainted with it," replied Balus, supposing that the dancer

referred to the proclamation which had just been made in the Imperial Forum. "By this time it is being shouted in all the streets of Rome. Listen!" and he held up his finger.

In the far distance sounded the acclamation of the people, "Long live Decius!" The words were distinctly heard.

"Not that," said Lela, trembling, "not that; I did not know of that. It will be a second blow."

"What then?" asked Balus with some surprise.

Lela sat down suddenly on the rubble pavement, for she could no longer stand. Then she rocked herself to and fro in an agony of grief, but still she did not weep; the fountain of her tears was dried up.

Balus forgot his own troubles in the presence of Lela's sorrow. He laid his hand upon the girl's shoulder, and murmured

softly, "The Lord comfort thee, O Lela."

"May it be so," replied the dancer in a stifled voice. "It is meet that He should comfort me for all the burdens which He hath made me bear."

"Christians must not murmur," said the deacon. "It is right that their faith should be tried with many trials."

"This is too great a trial," gasped poor Lela.

"What is it?" asked Balus; "you have not told me yet."

Lela shuddered and was silent. Presently she raised herself with an effort, and said in a hard, strange voice, "Aulus Camillus is dead. He fell with Philip. He sought to defend him."

Balus started. "Iope!" he murmured, catching his breath.

"Iope!" echoed Lela, with a bitter accent;

"yes, all Rome will pity Iope, the star of the secular games, but no one will give a thought——to——to—" The last word was smothered in her palla. She threw it over her head.

"Where did you learn this, O Lela?" said Balus after a pause.

"I saw cypress on the threshold of his house," answered poor Lela with difficulty; "and when I had recovered from the emotions which it produced I went in and inquired who had departed. Alas, alas! there needed no reply. The slaves were all weeping."

"Come," said Balus; "I will go with thee and tell Quintilia what has happened."

And Lela rose without another word.

Quintilia was seated in the peristylium with a roll of papyrus upon her lap,—the same which had been so often studied by Acatia. It was spread open, and she bent

over it as though she read the sacred words inscribed upon the surface with an intense earnestness, but her thoughts were far away,—with Acatia in the heavens, with Laberius in the temple of Jupiter, with Iope at Laurentum.

Presently the tapestry which concealed the entrance to the atrium was stirred, and she started like one suddenly awakened from sleep. The precious writings fell upon the ground.

Balus entered, and Lela, who had admitted him, instantly dropped the curtain.

"Lady," said Balus, advancing towards the place where Quintilia sat, "the sad information which I bring must excuse my intrusion."

"Thou art ever welcome, O Balus," replied Quintilia quietly; and lifting the fallen papyrus she replaced it in its former position.

Balus leant against one of the marble columns, considering how he should deliver his errand.

Meanwhile Quintilia tapped the papyrus with her fingers, wondering why he hesitated.

"I have heard of the proclamation," she said at last. "Doubtless the new Emperor will persecute the Christians. His antipathy to them is well known."

The deacon was astonished at the calmness with which she spoke. His own heart fluttered painfully whenever he thought of the subject.

"Yes," said Balus, "I fear there is a time of trial at hand."

"If our faith is sure, we need fear nothing," remarked Quintilia. "The matter does not disturb me."

"Were you not meditating upon the subject when I entered?" asked the deacon.

"No," emphatically replied the noble maiden.

"My task is easier than I thought," murmured Balus. "God hath given her a shield to ward off the blow."

"What say you?" said Quintilia.

Balus repeated his words in a louder tone.

Quintilia became thoughtful.

"Have you other news for me?" she asked at length.

"Yes," replied Balus; "but I know not how to make the communication."

"Be not afraid," answered Quintilia, rising to her feet. "I am strong and able to suffer. It is only suspense that I cannot bear." But her face became pallid as she spoke.

Balus took her hand in his.

"Quintilia," said he, "the stroke will not hurt thee so much as another."

"What other?" she inquired in a low voice.

"Iope."

"Oh!" gasped Quintilia, guessing the truth. And then Balus told her what had happened.

Quintilia walked to the other end of the peristylium, and came back with her face yet paler than before, and her hands clasped convulsively together upon her bosom.

What would be the next act? Balus watched her, full of dread. Voiceless grief is often dangerous in its results.

Suddenly she stopped by the side of the fountain, bent over it and tossed a handful of water into her face. Then she rose, and said softly, "Unhappy Iope! trouble cometh to thee early."

"It may be for the best end," said Balus.

"It may be," echoed Quintilia in a strange tone.

"Who will tell her?" asked Balus presently.

"I will," replied Quintilia, starting from the reverie into which she had fallen. "Who else could do it with such tenderness? Order a rheda, O Balus, and seek out the physician. We will go to Laurentum at once, Paulinus and I and Lela."

Lela! The colour rushed back into the face of Quintilia. She had forgotten that the death of Aulus Camillus would strike pain to more than one heart. Where was Lela? Had she learned the dreadful truth during her morning ramble, and was she bearing her cross in secret?

Without saying another word Quintilia crossed the peristylium and drew aside the tapestry which closed the entrance to the atrium. She would inquire among the slaves if anything had been heard or seen of her favourite handmaid. But that was not necessary.

Stretched on the pavement at her feet lay

Lela, stricken down by a fit of insensibility the moment she had parted from Balus.

That night the sobbing Iope pillowed her head on the bosom of Quintilia, and listened with patience to the stories which Acatia had often read aloud in the hope of arresting her attention, but which she had never before found any interest in. "He often smites down our idols that we may learn to worship the true God," said Quintilia.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SOPHIST IN A NEW MOOD.

"GO quietly and find Laberius the priest. Watch him, and tell me when he is alone, for I would speak with him privately before sunset."

These words were addressed by Claudius Bromius to his confidential attendant, and the freed man immediately left the cubiculum to fulfil the behest. Meanwhile the Sophist flung himself upon a couch and heaved a heavy sigh.

Outwardly Claudius Bromius is not changed. He still preaches and practises the philosophy of sensual pleasures. To make life agreeable is his highest aim. The frequency of his banquets is not diminished.

All who seek his society are entertained with imperial splendour, and in the assemblies of his guests he shines with surpassing lustre. His wit still sparkles. When he laughs there is a diffusion of joy in every breast, and the charm of his speech and manner daily increases the multitude of his disciples.

If possible, the revelries at the mansion in the Latin Road have become more frequent than when Laberius was under the spell of the Sophist; but outward appearance is no index to the reality. Within, Bromius is restless, fretful, dissatisfied. He has willed, and his will has been thwarted. He has coveted, but what he wished he cannot have. Quintilia is ever before his mind. Her words haunt him. He cannot brook the refusal, and the more he feels that the object he desires cannot be possessed, the more he burns for possession.

O cruel flame, that increases as hope diminishes!

Quintilia had returned to Rome after the funeral of Acatia to be the comforter of her brother, but the sudden death of Aulus Camillus had carried her back to Laurentum to console Iope. She is now buried in sorrow, and is far removed from all the thoughts which torment Bromius.

But sorrow may depart. Time, which restores all things, may heal the wounds which bereavement has inflicted. There would be hope if this were all, but there is yet another barrier between Quintilia and Bromius. She has become a Christian. What fortune can be expected ever to bring into one channel the diverging streams of two such different lives? Bromius, however, will not fail without an effort. He suffers no time to be lost till he devises a plan for the fulfilment of his purpose.

In the meantime Philip has fallen, and Decius has become Emperor.

Bromius the Sophist and Decius the Senator had long been friends, and under any other circumstances the brilliant Bromius would have welcomed his late companion to the purple with the most extravagant rejoicings. But the Christianity of Quintilia has filled him with alarm. Well acquainted with the feelings of the new Emperor towards those who held the creed of Christus, he saw the shadow of a sword, and trembled lest the fatal instrument of death should descend.

It was an unhappy accident which took Quintilia to Laurentum, but it afforded to Claudius Bromius the opportunity which he desired, and he awaited with impatience the return of the messenger whom he had sent in search of Laberius.

The messenger was long in coming, and

Bromius became weary of his thoughts. He arose and strode towards the little chamber which contained the library of his house, opened a bronze cabinet with a golden key and took forth the writings of Epictetus. In no mood for choice, the Sophist had taken the first roll presented to his hand, and he spread it before him in the same indifferent spirit, reading carelessly the first sentence which attracted his attention. It was this :

"I had always rather have that which happens; because I esteem that better which God wills than that which I should will." And further on he read, "Lift up thine eyes with confidence to God, and say, Henceforth, Lord, deal with me as Thou pleasest. I am of the same opinion with Thee, just of the same mind that Thou art, I refuse nothing that seems good to Thee. Lead me where Thou wilt; clothe me with what garments Thou pleasest; set me in a

public place, or keep me in a private condition; continue me in mine own country, or banish me from it; bestow wealth upon me, or leave me to conflict and struggle with poverty: which of these Thou pleasest. If men shall censure this providence towards me, and say Thou dealest hardly with me, I will apologize for Thee; I will undertake and maintain Thy cause, that what Thou doest is best for me."

"What!" exclaimed Bromius, suddenly casting aside the papyrus, "this slave so happy, the poor piece of deformity content with his condition and willing to give up his own will to the will of another, and here I fret and repine because everything does not go with me as I would have it go! I am tossed on a troubled sea of passion, while this man rides triumphant over the billows. I am a slave to my pleasures. Have I said it? Is

it not true? I am the slave, and Epictetus is the free man."

These reflections were interrupted by the return of the messenger, who announced that Laberius, the priest of Jupiter, had gone into the gardens of Sallust. "I left him," he added, "seated by the statue of Pallas, in the solitary grove of cedars, with a little spy to observe his movements."

"It is well," replied Bromius, and he demanded his lectica.

"It abides thy coming, O illustrious patron," was the answer; and the Sophist immediately hurried towards the court, where the bearers were accustomed to set down the vehicle.

Laberius had not changed his place nor his attitude when Claudius Bromius reached the pleasure-grounds of the old historian. He sat on the steps at the base of the statue of Pallas, leaning his back against the

pedestal, with his hands resting upon his knees, and his unsandaled feet dipping in the water of a little stream which flowed past the goddess. Apparently he listened to the musical ripple of the little stream, and watched its vagaries as it bubbled and splashed over the innumerable pebbles and broken pieces of rock deposited in its bed, on its way to the thermæ of the gardens.

For once his face was cleared from the expression of melancholy which it had worn of late, and a smile played around his lips.

Iope was free. One of the obstacles which had made his future so dark had been suddenly removed, and he basked in the bright scenes which his imagination presented as the hazy representation of a reality to come. Selfish in the enjoyment of his pleasant anticipations, he had forgotten the sadness of the source from whence his joy had arisen.

Claudius Bromius read the thoughts of the young priest as he noiselessly approached the spot which he had chosen for his meditations.

"The fates have befriended thee, O Laberius," said he suddenly, though softly, placing his hand upon the shoulder of Laberius, and grasping him tight lest he should escape.

"Yes," replied Laberius, startled out of the truth. Then he turned as white as a leper, and desired to be released.

But the Sophist, instead of a reply, drew him back to his seat upon the steps, and placed himself by his side.

"Tempt me not," murmured Laberius, "for my sister's sake. I have done with thy banquets and thy entertainments."

"Banquets and entertainments!" echoed Bromius with a bitter accent. "Thinkest thou that I have no interest in aught else?

I am more in a mood to hear a dirge than listen to the song of a bacchanalian."

"Thou rememberest Aulus Camillus?" said Laberius, feeling repentant.

"Yes," replied the Sophist; "but I think of the living rather than the dead, how they may be preserved from the sharp dagger." Then he said in a low voice, "Who can tell how many Christians will perish when Decius returns?"

Laberius shivered.

"Thou knowest, O Laberius," continued Bromius, "that Decius, reasonable in all things, is unreasonable in his hatred of the Christians. This is his weakness. I have heard him protest that he would like to annihilate them all with one blow, and he hath even found an excuse for the cruelty shown unto them by Nero. No fate is too bad for the Nazarenes in the opinion of Decius, and the friendliness of his pre-

decessor will be another plea for their destruction: all are doomed—doomed to sacrifice or die."

Laberius groaned.

"Every family in Rome will suffer from the stroke," continued Bromius, "either directly or indirectly. The new religion hath crept into so many hearts, and is rising above the level of the popular scorn. There is room in Rome for the gods of all nations, —why not for this Christus?"

"Ah, why not?" sighed Laberius. "I was almost——" he paused suddenly, and the colour rushed into his face.

"Almost a Christian," finished Claudius Bromius. "And why not, O priest of Jupiter? If man must have a god, one like Christus—the embodiment of all virtues—is surely a more worthy object than the deities whom we honour and whose vices we imitate. But the wise have no gods."

"Yet are they not happy," reflected the young priest.

"It is impossible to expect happiness," replied Bromius bitterly. "The fates ever deny us the one thing which promises to ensure it." He thought of Quintilia.

Laberius made no reply. He was thinking of Iope. A jewel which he had supposed to be irretrievably lost had been suddenly restored to him. The fates were certainly not always unkind.

And the thoughts of both betrayed them into a long silence.

Bromius was the first to break the spell.

"It is fortunate thy sister hath departed for Laurentum," he said quietly; "she must not return to Rome."

"Who can control Quintilia?" replied Laberius. "Not Plotinus nor Paulinus, when she fancies that her own heart directs her aright."

"And hath Fabian no influence?" asked Bromius.

"It may be," replied Laberius.

"It *must* be," said the Sophist. "Laberius, I am come to carry thee to Fabian. A letter from the aged Christian will incline Quintilia to give herself up to her friends. Decius approaches Rome, and there is little time to be lost. Secure her obedience before the danger comes, and when it lowers overhead we shall the more readily persuade her to escape its fury. From the day that Decius enters Rome a ship will be waiting for passengers in the nearest creek to the villa of Quintilius."

"O Bromius," exclaimed Laberius, grasping the hand of the Sophist, "how I have misjudged thee!"

"I do not despair of my reward," replied Bromius, rising from his seat with some emotion.

"It cannot fail to come," answered the young priest. And he followed the Sophist to his lectica.

Claudius Bromius did not accompany Laberius to the house of Fabian. Directing the bearers thither, he waved his farewell, and strode towards the thermæ of the gardens, where he proposed to await their return.

When Laberius arrived at the small portico of the aged bishop's house he saw him sitting in the little atrium watching the movements and listening to the song of a young maiden, one of his grandchildren, who was watering his favourite flowers. Thus sang the maiden,—

Far in sin's dark mists
Lost do I roam;
Who shall direct me
To find my own?

Where is my home? say
  Where is my rest?—
No more on earth, 'tis
  On my Lord's breast.

O Lord, embrace me,
  Then am I well,
Then am I harboured
  From evil spell.

No ill shall touch me,
  No fear alarm;
With my beloved
  I'm safe from harm.

As the last note echoed, Laberius stepped over the threshold of the vestibule, and Fabian, observing his approach, instantly rose to give him welcome.

In a few minutes the young priest had delivered his errand.

"My son," replied Fabian, placing his hand on the shoulder of Laberius, and regarding him with a steadfast gaze, "why should we anticipate the evil day?" 'Suffi-

cient unto the day is the evil thereof.' We shall not be found unarmed for the battle when the trumpet is sounded, for the Lord will put on our armour in due season. Leave thy sister alone. She is a true Christian, and thus will be ready for all emergencies,—for life or for death, whatsoever the Almighty deemeth best."

And with this answer Laberius was compelled to be satisfied.

When it was repeated to Claudius Bromius he recalled the words which had been written by Epictetus the slave, and said to himself, "What Stoics these Christians are!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ARREST OF FABIAN.

"PLOTINUS," said Paulinus, suddenly entering the little chamber of the philosopher on the Servian Wall, one noon after the accession of Decius, "the new Emperor intends to second your efforts for the regeneration of society. He hath revived the ancient and obsolete office of Censor, and now at least Rome will be compelled to hide her vices under the garb of virtue. Read here the address of Decius to Valerian, who has been chosen for the exalted honour. I had it inscribed upon these tablets for your edification."

He handed the waxen memorial to Plotinus, and the philosopher read as follows :

"Happy Valerian, happy in the general approbation of the Senate and of the Roman Republic! accept the censorship of mankind, and judge of our manners. You will select those who deserve to continue members of the Senate; you will restore the equestrian order to its ancient splendour; you will improve the revenue, yet moderate the public burdens. You will distinguish into regular classes the various and infinite multitude of citizens, and accurately review the military strength, the wealth, the virtue, and the resources of Rome. Your decisions shall obtain the force of laws. The army, the palace, the ministers of justice, and the great officers of the Empire, are all subject to your tribunal. None are exempted, excepting only the ordinary consuls, the prefect of the city, the king of the sacrifices, and—as long as she preserves her chastity inviolate—the eldest of the vestal

virgins. Even these few, who may not dread the severity, will anxiously solicit the esteem, of the Roman Censor."

"Well," said Paulinus, when the philosopher had quietly laid aside the tablets with an expression of satisfaction, "what comment, O Plotinus?"

"The intention is good," replied Plotinus, "and the design is one worthy of success; nay, more, it is one necessary to the restoration and re-establishment of the Roman Empire."

The physician smoothed his long white beard.

"Do you foresee the whole result?" he said, without any perceptible change in his voice. "It means, not only the restoration of our ancient manners and customs, but the rooting out of all foreign superstitions."

"That is desirable," said Plotinus.

"It means opposition to Christianity, and

perhaps a repetition of the scenes which made Rome run with blood in the days of Nero."

Plotinus held up his hands suddenly, as though he would ward off an enemy.

"How blind I am!" he exclaimed. "I did not see that. What shall we do with the maidens? Iope hath listened to Quintilia in her trouble, and hath, says the letter, found rest in Christus."

"Send them back to Laurentum," answered the physician promptly. "Laberius tells me that there is a ship anchored close to the villa which awaiteth passengers. Let them take passage therein, and then if there come a necessity—which, alas! I fear is near at hand—it will be easy to despatch them to a shore where concealment is not so difficult. If my advice had been taken, Valaria would never have brought them back to Rome, though by the gods, her

design was good. If the little Greek had only had her former humour, the change of scene would certainly have put the cause of her grief out of her head, but this Christianity appears to have altered her very nature. Gravity is natural to Quintilia, but unnatural in Iope. My heart aches when I see her emulate the stateliness and seriousness of her cousin, shrinking from the most innocent amusements as though they were serpents. What will be her demeanour when she hath received all the instruction which Fabian and Balus can afford, I am at a loss to determine. In my opinion, they have done more harm to the child than the shock of her lover's fall. Send her away, O Plotinus. Send both the maidens back to Laurentum before it is too late."

"Be it so," replied Plotinus, lifting the roll of papyrus which he had been studying when the physician entered, as though he

desired to continue its perusal. "Let them depart."

"Your commands are necessary," answered Paulinus drily. "Quintilia will find a ready excuse to set aside the proposal if it comes from me. Assume your cloak, O philosopher, and let us determine the matter at once. It weighs on my mind, and I would fain be relieved of it."

Plotinus could not well refuse the request, but he heaved a sigh of regret as he replaced his favourite roll in its purple envelope.

At the portico of his house Paulinus was summoned to the Palace, and Plotinus therefore entered alone. In the vestibule he encountered his wards. Quintilia and Iope were each enshrouded in a dark-coloured palla of the plainest material, and Lela, who accompanied them, was habited in a similar garment.

"Whither do you go, O my children?" asked Plotinus, after greeting them.

They answered without hesitation:

"To the house of Fabian."

"It was but yesterday that ye were there," remarked the philosopher. "Why so often?"

"For our instruction and edification," replied Quintilia. "Sweet it is to hear more and more of the good Lord who suffered for our salvation."

"Can you not read His history in your chamber?" said Plotinus.

"Ay, certainly," answered Quintilia; "but the comments of Fabian and Balus heighten its interest, and cast a light upon those portions which would be otherwise incomprehensible to our minds."

"There we meet pleasant friends," said Iope.

"That may be," replied Plotinus, smiling;

"but I would rather that you did not make the adventure so frequently."

"We take a guard with us," said Quintilia, "and soldiers are sometimes hired by the bishop to protect his assemblies; but the populace are now become so accustomed to the sight of Christian worshippers that they do not much annoy us—although an occasional stone or the utterance of an ill name will remind us that the spirit of persecution is not dead. Laberius would indeed persuade us that evil times are about to return, but as yet we have seen no indication of the storm."

"Nevertheless, I fear it is at hand," replied Plotinus seriously. "Decius does not love the Christians, and it is therefore reasonable to suppose that he will soon make an effort to clear his Empire of their presence. You must go back to Laurentum, O my children, for Rome will

not be a safe abode for you if our fears are realized."

"Laurentum is not more secure than Rome during a time of persecution, O guardian," remarked Quintilia.

"No," replied Plotinus; "but the friendly sea washes Laurentum."

"I would not fly from my Lord's will," said Quintilia proudly. "He shall do with me what seemeth Him best."

"Nor I," murmured Iope.

"Children," answered Plotinus with some sternness, "you cannot decide for yourselves in this matter. Be Christians if you will. I see no reason why every man should not serve God as he thinks He ought to be served, but I forbid you to run into danger, and your will is subordinate to mine. In two days, therefore, I send you to Laurentum."

Quintilia bowed her head in silent ac-

quiescence, and the philosopher left his wards to proceed on their journey to the house of Fabian.

The sun had sunk during the conversation in the vestibule, and the brief hour of twilight was rapidly fading when the lectica which conveyed the cousins was set down before the bishop's portico.

Since the accession of Decius the number of Christians who were accustomed to assemble in the house of Fabian had greatly decreased. They had not abandoned the community, but the rumours which were abroad had made them cautious of attending any public assemblies for Christian worship. No demonstration had as yet been made against their faith, but the tranquility which was still enjoyed was now regarded as the calm before the storm, and they were unwilling to expose themselves to danger.

Thus it happened that only some of the boldest and most sincere of the Christians were present with the bishop when Quintilia and her companions arrived.

These faithful servants of Christ, with five earnest catechumens, about a dozen persons in all, were assembled together in the small *cavum œdium* or central court of the house, the most convenient place for their accommodation in consequence of the open roof, which afforded fresh air, and the surrounding covered passages, which presented a better chance of escape in case of an interruption. They occupied the wooden benches which projected from the wall, and Fabian, seated in his chair in their midst, read to them in a low, pleasant voice from his favourite roll of papyrus. The aged man paused when the maidens entered, to give them the accustomed greeting, and then they stole quietly to their places,—Iope, with

the air of one privileged, taking a low stool that was near to the bishop. He lifted his hand and rested it upon her head with a benevolent smile.

The young Greek is greatly changed by her bereavement. Her innocent beauty and careless grace retain their charm, but it is no longer the same. She was startled into momentary seriousness by the sight of Acatia's dead face, but the death of Aulus Camillus has exorcised for ever the frivolous spirit which inclined the young Greek hither and thither with a butterfly movement, and a butterfly enjoyment of every bright object which attracted her attention. There has come a strange wistfulness into the eyes which were used to express only mirth. The little, full lips have an inclination to tremble, and the rich colour is no more stationary in the childishly round cheeks. A breath will make it deepen its hue or cause it to abandon

its post. If she speaks, she often pauses abruptly, as though she would reconsider the words she would say. If she laughs, her merriment is not unfrequently arrested by a serious thought. Quintilia can no longer complain that her cousin is without a soul.

As soon as the reading of the Gospel was over, Balus lifted a small harp which was lying at his feet, and placed it in the hands of Lela.

"Strike," said he, "the key-note of a song unto the Lord."

"Ay, let us praise Him," responded all present.

Then Lela laid aside her veil, and stepped forth from her place into the circle of Christians, tuning the harp.

"Ay," echoed she, "let us praise Him. Sing, all ye that honour Him and love His name."

Oh blest the day when we call'd on the Lord!
From His high throne He answer'd us with speed;
Unto our trembling souls was given strength,—
The weak were made courageous in their need.

O great Jehovah, monarchs of the earth
To Thee thanksgivings raise, Thy praises sing;
Awed by the wisdom of Thy words and ways,
Kings bow the knee before a greater King.

High is Jehovah, high He sits enthroned;
We know not where, we cannot see His face;
Yet doth He note the proud and scorn their ways,
Regard the humblest saint in ev'ry place.

If I should walk in trouble, Lord, be near
To strengthen me and arm me 'gainst the foe,—
The foe without, the greater foe within;
Help me, my God, while linger I below.

I doubt not Thy right hand will lead me on,
Safe to the haven where I fain would rest;
Jehovah, Thou wilt perfect all my ways,
That I may find sweet shelter on Thy breast.

O great Jehovah, ever burns Thy love,
Thy tender mercies cannot cease to be;
Forsake not Thou the works of Thy great hands;
O Lord, in all my straits remember me.

—PSALM cxxxviii.

All the Christians joined in the singing of the psalm, and there was not one among them indifferent to the sense of the words which were uttered. Each sang with an expression which plainly indicated that the voice was attuned by the heart. The declaration of faith in the Lord's protection and lovingkindness was pealed forth in loud, triumphant notes. The prayer, "Forsake not Thou the works of Thy hands," was breathed with intense earnestness in a low chant,—every singer instinctively lifting his eyes to the heavens and folding his hands.

The music gradually ceased, dying away in a few soft, pathetic chords. Then Lela gently laid aside the harp and hid her face in her veil.

A pause ensued, and Fabian arose from his seat.

None felt the applicability of the prayer which had just been wafted upward on the

wings of melody more than Fabian himself.

He had listened to it with his eyes closed and his mind concentrated on the probable events of the future. In a mental vision he had seen many of those who stood around him called to be sacrificed for the faith. He had realized their presence and supported their courage with his presence and his ministrations.

When he arose from his seat his eyes were still fixed on the phantoms which his imagination had raised. "O God," he said, "Thou who didst so inspire Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with Thy Spirit, that they were able to walk boldly into the fire and about the fire, be with these Thy servants in the furnace which their enemies prepare for them. Send Thine angel to be present with them, that they may walk unscathed into Thy high heavens."

Fabian spoke like a prophet, and all who heard him bowed their heads lower upon their breasts, and inwardly resigned themselves to an inevitable fate.

At that solemn moment a loud summons was heard at the portico, and Balus, amid the silence of the assembly, rose to learn the business of the intruder.

Fabian smiled. He fancied the signal for the fulfilment of his prophecy had come.

In the meantime Balus talked with the captain of a company of soldiers who had come in search of Fabian.

"Why would you speak with my aged relative?" demanded Balus.

"He hath treasures," answered the captain, "which the Emperor desires to have in his own keeping."

"What treasures?" said Balus. "We have no treasures here save a bronze cup and a patina of cedar wood,—priceless

treasures unto us, but worthless articles unto the Emperor."

The voice of the deacon was heard within, and Fabian urged the assembly to disperse and escape by the passages, but no one stirred.

The aged bishop grasped his staff and moved towards the arras which concealed the entrance into the atrium.

"Father," whispered Quintilia, arresting his progress, "you must not go forth. Balus will succeed in satisfying the officer. Tarry among us and trust him."

Fabian shook his head.

"If I do not go out unto them," he said, "they will come in unto me, and then will all my children be exposed to their observation. I perceive that their demand is but an excuse for the seizure of this poor person, and they shall have it if it be God's will. Willingly would I lay down my life for His sake."

"I protest that we have no other treasures here," continued Balus. "Is not the business concluded when I say that?"

"No," replied the captain; "we must hear the same from Fabian himself."

"Thou shalt do so, O friend," replied the bishop, suddenly appearing in the portico. The aged and benevolent countenance, the long white beard, the gentle yet dignified bearing of the saintly Fabian, commanded the respect of the soldiers. Instinctively they all saluted him.

"Father," said the captain, in tones which contrasted strangely with those he had hitherto employed, "we intrude upon you by the command of Decius. He has heard that you guard imperial treasure, and he has sent us to transport it to his palace. Tell us where it lies concealed, and you shall be relieved from our presence."

"The Emperor has been misinformed,"

replied Fabian quietly. "I have no such treasure. Philip did indeed trust me with his gold and his silver for a few days, but they were removed before his expedition."

"It is said that they are hidden in the catacombs," remarked the officer.

"It may be," answered Fabian; "I know not."

"At least we must search there for them, with thee for our guide," said the captain reluctantly.

"So be it," replied Fabian, and he turned in search of his toga, but Balus interposed.

"Perchance, O uncle," said he, "the soldiers will take me in thy place. I am young, and the old should be spared."

"No," said the captain; "that cannot be. Our commands were to take Fabian alone. Thou mayest not even accompany him."

"And if thy search is vain, as needs it must be?" inquired Balus anxiously.

"Then we take thy relative before the Emperor," said the soldier.

"Alas!" cried Balus, with a spasm of pain.

"Why 'Alas!' O my son?" asked Fabian. "Am I not ripe grain for the Lord? Be not troubled because He calleth me away in haste. I have long been prepared."

The Christians who were within the *cavum œdium* could remain quiet no longer. Headed by Quintilia they all hurried towards the portico to bid their aged bishop farewell —farewell for ever.

Fabian appeared troubled for a moment at their appearance, but the next moment he smiled and lifted his hands to give them his benediction.

Impetuous Iope clung to him as he did this, and Lela, falling on the ground, embraced his feet. With the greatest difficulty the soldiers removed the maidens.

Meanwhile Quintilia stood like a statue,

considering what means might be taken to save him.

His departure aroused her from her thoughts. She clasped her hands and cried after him:

"O my father, say not that thou goest to thy death."

Fabian looked back, but his reply was inaudible. The reflection of the torches, however, showed a smile upon his face.

In another moment the soldiers and their captive had disappeared, and Quintilia was hurrying her companions into the lectica.

"We will go," said she, "to the house of Plotinus, and petition him to plead for the life of Fabian."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST VICTIM.

PLOTINUS had no sooner heard that Fabian was arrested than he hastened to the house of the physician.

In the portico stood Paulinus.

"I was about to visit thee, O philosopher," he said. His accent was sad, and his countenance was grave.

"On the same errand which hath brought me hither, I doubt not," replied Plotinus —"to speak of the arrest of Fabian."

"Even so," answered the physician. "What is to be done?"

"We must visit the Emperor and plead for him," said Plotinus. "I can think of no

other course. I knew him as a wise senator, and in you he has a physician to whom he entrusts his life."

"We can try your proposal," said Paulinus gloomily; "but I have no great hopes of success."

"At once," said Plotinus, moving in the direction of the Palatine.

Paulinus arrested the steps of the impulsive philosopher with a smile.

"That is impossible, O my friend," he said gently. "Do you not perceive that the moon sits high? Decius will be resting after his banquet, and to disturb him were perchance dangerous. The purple hath been known to change the disposition of a lamb into that of a wolf."

"Alas!" exclaimed Plotinus, "I cannot bear to think that the infirm form of the aged and harmless Fabian is extended upon the damp floor of a prison, even for a night."

"Nor I," replied Paulinus; "but that must be endured which hath no remedy. Get thee into the house and console the maidens, while I hurry to the governors of the prison, and procure for the old man all the comforts which can be allowed. To-morrow we will make our petitions to the Emperor, and the gods give us favour in the sight of their Pontifex Maximus."

The marble portico, the lofty vestibulum, the spacious atrium of Cæsar's palace were crowded with a multitude who had come to pay their customary morning salutations to the Emperor, and a number of strangers who sought his patronage or an audience.

Decius had not yet appeared, and the interval of waiting was filled up with conversation, observation, or any engagement which presented a means of passing away the time. Grave senators discussed in mysterious whispers important questions of

State, or paced the marble colonnade in communion with themselves. Idle courtiers tossed the dice in quiet corners, or criticized the jewels which a merchant of the Neva had brought for the Imperial inspection. Patricians moved hither and thither conversing with their clients, while poets and artists read their verses or exhibited their works to all who were willing to pay them any attention. Occasionally some civic dignitary marched through the throng arrayed in the most imposing splendour of his office, and here and there was to be seen a magistrate, attended by his lictors, observing with a catlike interest the behaviour of each person present. The majestic, motionless figures of the Prætorian guards, with their shining helmets, polished breastplates, and glittering spears, were conspicuous on all sides, but the number of the soldiers was exceeded by that of the flamens. Hither and

thither they flitted, with flowing robes and noiseless footsteps, listening to every conversation, or taking a part in it with sly glances and mysterious comments, which left the minds of their hearers suspicious and ill at ease.

The unexpected advent of the philosopher and the physician took the company by surprise. For a moment there was a hush, and every person turned to observe the newcomers as they walked with quiet dignity through the vestibule towards the atrium. Paulinus saluted all whom he knew, but the absence of the pleasant remark which usually accompanied the greeting was striking. Presently, perceiving a senator who was walking alone at the extremity of the court, he abruptly left his companion and hurried forward. Plotinus immediately paused and became the centre of a curious crowd but the philosopher saw not the

attention which he excited. His eyes were fixed upon the tesselated pavement, his thoughts were with Fabian.

The senator to whom Paulinus had addressed himself was one who had great influence with Decius, and at the request of the physician he instantly procured a message to be carried to the Emperor announcing the presence of Plotinus.

A command for the philosopher and Paulinus to come into a private cubiculum of the Palace then occupied by Decius was the reply.

Through a passage lined with Prætorian guards this sanctuary was reached. "Who would be an Emperor," said Plotinus afterwards, "if a little space for rest and thought must be secured like a besieged city?" Two gigantic Ethiopians, hideous in their clothing of lions' skins, terrible with drawn swords, moved lazily from their post before

the closed portal at a signal from the guide who conducted the visitors. A second door must be unbarred, a second arras uplifted by the most confidential of the Imperial attendants, before the philosopher and the physician found themselves in the presence of the Emperor.

Decius reclined upon his couch unencumbered by any apparel or insignia of his lofty position. A simple tunic of fine linen, deeply bordered with purple, covered his manly form. His arms and legs were bare, and his feet were but slightly protected by plain leather sandals, braced upon them by white thongs. The only ornament which he displayed was a narrow golden fillet, necessary for the confinement of his hair, which would otherwise have hung heavily over his intellectual brow.

A large tablet of prepared wax lay upon a small silver tripod at his side, and in his

hand he held a sharp-pointed stylus of the same precious metal. Several long circular cases of a valuable wood, labelled with the names of their contents, were strewn upon the pavement, together with some rolls of unused papyrus, a pentagonal inkstand of embossed bronze, and a number of Egyptian reeds, many of them already sharpened at the point for the purpose of writing, with a pigment made from the juice of the sepia.

On the entrance of Plotinus and the physician the Emperor laid aside his stylus, and dismissed the secretary who was in attendance.

"*Salve*, O my friends!" he exclaimed in the most affable of voices. "Such favoured sons of the gods are ever welcome in the Imperial presence."

The salutation and the compliment were both acknowledged with a low obeisance.

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nations. It is the will of the God of all gods that men should have perfect freedom in the pursuit of truth, and in the open confession of what they believe to be true. If men are dishonest with themselves, to punish them is the business of the gods, and divine retribution is unfailing. While we are in the pursuit of truth all men cannot be of the same opinion. Some have apprehended more, some less; some have the truth in part, and some see it under different aspects. The gods demand above all things sincerity; where this is they are long-suffering, and rulers should ask no more than loyalty. Men may be good subjects and good citizens though they worship different gods or hold different creeds, and I can testify that the Christians are of pure lives and honest purpose. I deplore their errors, but they are not of a kind injurious to a commonwealth. We may live in peace

with them, and by the all-embracing comprehensiveness for which the Roman Empire has become famous above all other empires, they may be permitted without danger to have their own worship."

There was a pause. Then Decius answered with dignity that he had long seen with alarm the increase of the Christians. The former Emperor had shown them too much favour, and he could see that as soon as they were sufficiently numerous to be a power in the Empire they would be dangerous to the commonwealth. He then gave many reasons for not tolerating the Christians, and said in conclusion: "I am a Roman. By traditions handed down from my forefathers, I have been taught to regard with a scrupulous care the honour of the Roman gods. They watched over the infant state of Rome. While the Romans were frugal and honoured the

gods, prosperity attended them in the arts of peace, and the Roman eagle was victorious in all lands. But now the city suffers from luxury and licentiousness on the one hand, and from filth and fever, poverty and wretchedness, on the other. Earthquakes shake the Seven Hills, and fiery portents dazzle the heavens. The Goths invade the distant provinces, and if we do not propitiate the gods they may come even to the gates of the city. Man has no power against the immortals. We must honour them, please them, and execute their will; and their will is the destruction of all their enemies. The Christians are the enemies of the gods, and must be sacrificed to avert the divine wrath."

"August Emperor," replied Plotinus, "I am no Christian, but I may venture to say, in the presence of the Imperial ruler of the world, that to banish some of the gods now

worshipped in Rome would be the most important step towards the reformation of the prevailing licentiousness. The Romans will return to their original frugality and temperance if the simplicity of the old Roman worship be restored. In the consulship of Piso and Gabinius, Bacchus and his mysteries were banished not from Rome only, but from all Italy, and with them the worship of Serapis and Isis; but now Bacchus is worshipped with frantic offerings, and the once expelled Egyptian deities are naturalized as Roman gods."

The Emperor answered that these were the gods whom he must appease, or be subject to their wrath, and therefore he could show no mercy to the Christians.

"Nevertheless," said Paulinus, who was becoming impatient, "we pray thee let our petition for old Fabian avail. Have mercy upon him, O august Emperor. He is an

aged man and peaceful, a lover of men, a good citizen. The shedding of his blood will be a crime at which the gods may be enraged, if they are worthy the name of gods."

"Fabian," replied the Emperor, "was the counsellor of Philip. He is one of their rulers, bishops, or overseers. To spare him would be to encourage the pernicious race. Here is a body of men raising up an empire within an empire, united, working together, helping each other, suffering for each other, and in the rulership of that community I see a vast power which may be used for the ruin of the Empire. Let the bishops become proud or ambitious, and what civil ruler can stand before them? There is no alternative for a Cæsar but to crush the rising power as he would crush the first beginning of an insurrection or a revolution."

"Then there is no hope for Fabian?" Plotinus ventured to say, making a last appeal.

"None, unless he recant and sacrifice to the gods," replied the Emperor with decision; and he lifted the tablet of wax and began to write upon it with his stylus as a means of dismissing the subject.

The philosopher and the physician instantly hastened to make their obeisance and withdraw.

They left the Palace and proceeded homeward with heavy hearts. Paulinus was especially overcome by the prospect of a persecution. He had many friends besides Fabian who were Christians, and he felt that, like their bishop, they would remain steadfast to their opinions, even if they had to perish for them.

"It is strange," he said to Plotinus, as soon as they had passed the last of the Prætorian guards, and were descending the Palatine,—"strange that men will put others to death because of their religion,

and stranger still that men are found who will die for what they believe concerning things of which they know nothing and cannot know."

"We ought at least to have freedom to think," answered Plotinus; "especially when the subjects are such as must be indifferent to the rulers, and cannot be injurious to the commonwealth. Domitian and Vespasian banished all philosophers from Rome, but we had reason to expect something better from Decius. The Christians are harmless, and ought to be protected by the same law which protects philosophers."

"They are their own enemies," said Paulinus. "How simple a thing it would be for them to sacrifice to the gods! They could still believe in Christ. I attend to all the ceremonies of the national religion; but as to the gods themselves, I leave them to

the care of the poets and the priests. It is sad to find Fabian so resolute in his faith that he will rather lose his life than burn incense at the altars of the gods of the Empire."

"I am sorry for Fabian," rejoined Plotinus; "but I can understand how there may be something which to him is dearer than life. Those who have felt the reality of the Unseen hold the temporal existence in but small esteem. The man who feels that he has truth is ready to die for it. Fabian has this feeling. He may be wrong,—I believe on many points he is wrong,—yet he has evidently felt the power of the spiritual world. Surely Decius ought to allow him to live."

As these words were uttered the wind carried forward the sound of a great multitude, and Paulinus turned aside to inquire the cause. The vintner to whom he spoke shrugged his shoulders to express his ignor-

ance, and the question was answered by a young legionary of the Tertiani, who at that moment emerged half intoxicated from the vaults.

"Fabian to the death!" cried he, flourishing his white shield until the silver boss in its centre seemed to dart fire; "and may all those who despise the gods share his fate."

"*Christianos ad leones!*" responded several loiterers who were standing near, and they moved off to meet the advancing multitude, for the leaders now appeared in sight.

The healthful face of Paulinus turned white. "Is the end so close?" he murmured.

Plotinus smiled. He was thinking how glad the old bishop would be to cast off his burden of flesh. Then they stood aside to let the rough heralds of the martyr pass.

On they came, all the roughs of the city, contending with each other, gesticulating,

casting stones, swearing terrible oaths against the Christians. Their animosity need no longer be suppressed, and it passed all bounds. The soldiers had much difficulty to keep their aged and infirm prisoner from being torn to pieces.

Fabian was carried in an open litter in the midst of his guards. Chains were upon his bare wrists and ankles, but he seemed unconscious of their weight. With his face lowered, his eyes closed, his lips moving with silent prayer, he was borne forward. Now and again he opened his eyes, looked upward, and smiled. Heaven was not far distant, and he thought of the welcome he was to receive. The procession was to him a triumph. He had fought the good fight, he had won the victory, and he was about to receive his reward. There was only one more dark portal to pass through before he entered into the joy of his Lord.

As the cavalcade approached the spot where the philosopher and the physician were standing, Paulinus stepped forward and prayed the centurion to let him have a last word with the prisoner.

"Why not?" replied the officer, who knew the physician well; and a passage was instantly made to the litter through the band of soldiers which surrounded it.

The philosopher followed Paulinus, and Fabian greeted both with a few pleasant words of surprise and welcome, stretching his hands towards them as far as his chains would allow.

"Fabian," said Paulinus, "you have our sympathy, but I cannot understand why you should die for your religion; you might have sacrificed, and held your own opinions all the same.'

"It is not a mere opinion for which I die," rejoined Fabian. "It is for truth

which I feel in my conscience; and to keep my conscience clear is worth all I have—even life itself. I have perfect peace, for I know in whom I have believed. Death is not the greatest evil; I know how to die. A few sharp pangs—that is all: then the victory."

"Happy Fabian!" said Plotinus. "You will soon be delivered from the bonds of the flesh, and come into the liberty of the spirit-world."

"I go to Christus," said Fabian. "In His presence there is fulness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures for evermore."

"We are sorry to see you suffer," said Paulinus, "and sorry to lose you. We have been to Decius to intercede for you, but he is determined to destroy the Christians."

"Do you see," said Fabian, "these hills on which our city is built? Do you see that Tiber rushing to the ocean? Do you see

that glorious sun which pours forth light and heat? Sooner may Decius tear up these hills and cast them into the sea; sooner may he make that Tiber, with its curled waves, flow back to its fountain; sooner may he darken the sunshine in the heavens, than extirpate Christianity from the world. O Plotinus, you and I have long looked for the kingdom of God. It must come. Its coming may not be as I expect it, or as you expect it, but come it must. I see the dawning of a better day. This old, rotten Roman world must perish. Decius will perish too, and the gods he worships, which are no gods, will perish with the world that worships them."

"Enough, enough," interrupted the centurion; "this is treason." And he gave the order to advance.

"*Vale! vale!* true and faithful friends," exclaimed Fabian, as his bearers lifted him

from the ground. "May the light dawn upon you, and may you see in Christ crucified the power of God and the wisdom of God. We Christians have learned to suffer because Christ suffered; and by suffering with Him we know that with Him we shall be glorified."

Plotinus and the physician moved away as the last words were uttered. The soldiers closed around their prisoner, and Fabian was seen no more.

CHAPTER X.

CALVUS AGAIN.

THE task of reporting to Quintilia the result of the interview which the philosopher and the physician had had with the Emperor devolved upon Paulinus, but the sun had risen to its full height, and the body of the martyred Fabian had been hastily and ignominiously interred, before the tender-hearted physician could summon sufficient courage to perform his errand.

Anxiously Quintilia awaited the return of the petitioners in her own apartment, but she betrayed no impatience, although her heart leapt every time the arras stirred, and she moved as if she were about to rise.

But she had ceased to be anxious when Paulinus appeared. The storm of emotion

which had been raging within her bosom had spent its force. She was no longer troubled about the fate of Fabian, but calm with a sense of his safety. Stretched upon a couch she reposed with her accustomed grace, resting her body while she refreshed her mind by reading one of her favourite rolls of papyrus.

Paulinus was surprised at the change. He had left her in tears, in a very agony of alarm and grief.

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed, stroking his beard gently. "Do I see Quintilia restored to her usual serenity? Is the trouble of Quintilia no longer-lived than that of Iope? Is it no deeper? Methought to find thee prostrate with emotion, not able to bear another stroke; but, by the gods, here thou art, with the demeanour of a Stoic, reading with the interest of a philosopher. O incomprehensible woman!"

"The necessity for my agitation is over," replied Quintilia, quietly. "Fabian is released."

"How can that be?" exclaimed Paulinus, in blank astonishment. "I saw him but a little while ago in the midst of his guards, and Decius was relentless."

"Yet he is free from his chains," said Quintilia, smiling. "And my mind is no longer disturbed on his account."

"O my child," answered the physician gravely, "who has told thee this? Who has sought to deceive thee? It was a base act. Truly Fabian has left that prison where he was incarcerated, but—but we shall never see him again: he is——" Paulinus hesitated.

"Dead—martyred," said Quintilia. "I know it." And she smiled again.

Paulinus gazed at the noble maiden with the manner of one who examined a natural curiosity. "Why dost thou not weep?" he

asked presently; "tears would be more appropriate than smiles now."

"Not so," answered Quintilia, returning the physician's observation with a singular expression in her beautiful eyes. "My tears *now* can avail Fabian nothing, and could they bring him back from the place whither he is gone I would not weep. While the child was yet alive King David fasted and wept, but when he was dead he arose and changed his garments, and ate bread. He knew that God had done what seemed unto Him best."

"The conduct of you Christians is beyond comprehension," said Paulinus.

"We trust very implicitly in our God," remarked Quintilia. "That is why we pass through fire without a murmur."

Paulinus shuddered. He had once seen a maiden about Quintilia's age proclaiming her reliance upon Christ in the midst

of scoffers, with fire curling about her feet.

"The celestials forbid that thy faith should ever be so tried, O Quintilia!" he exclaimed involuntarily.

"So desire not I," replied Quintilia, with calmness. "How am I to be proved if I have no trial?"

Here entered Lela.

"Lady," said she, posing herself with an unconscious grace on the threshold of the portal, "the philosopher Plotinus sends a messenger to bid thee delay not thy return with Valaria and Iope to Laurentum. At the seventh hour a rheda will wait before the portico to carry us thither"

"I am prepared," replied Quintilia. "This I expected."

"No doubt Laberius will accompany thee," remarked Paulinus.

"I will carry him a message," said Lela.

"Better send it by one of the Syrians," said the physician, remembering that Lela was in as much danger as her mistress.

But the dancer replied that she had an errand hard by the temple of Jupiter.

"The streets are filled with a multitude raging against the Christians," said Paulinus, anxious to frustrate the purpose of the dancer.

"What care I for a multitude?" answered Lela gaily. "Thinkest thou that I have forgotten all my cunning in this tranquil abode? *Vale*, physician; Lela can do the bidding of Quintilia better than the most trustworthy of thy slaves." And she departed.

With fleet feet the dancer sped upon her mission, deftly avoiding all the principal thoroughfares, and darting like a fawn into the shadow of a passage or a portico if her quick eye detected any obstacle in her

path. With equal rapidity and caution she set forth on her homeward course, but as she drew near to the house of Paulinus a little hand suddenly seized her tunica, and a shrill, childish voice implored her to pause for a moment.

"What is it?" she inquired, assenting to the petition as soon as she perceived that the petitioner was one of the half-clad little Arabs who were accustomed to roll over each other in the gutters of the Via Asinaria.

"Mother Septimia is sick," answered the urchin,—"dying they say, and she would see thee before her departure unto the shades."

"Thou art not the grandchild of Septimia," answered Lela, examining the little upturned face with a scrutinizing glance.

"Not I," replied the child, pertly, "nor would I stand in the place of Firmius and the small Talencus, to be beaten into good

behaviour with a stout reed; I played opposite to her portal, and a strange woman promised me an obolus to find thee and deliver the message. Septimia, she said, was kind unto thy mother."

"That is true," replied the dancer thoughtfully.

"And so you will see the old witch?" said the child impatiently. "Shall I run forward and tell the strange woman so?"

"Yes," replied Lela; "one cannot refuse a dying request." And turning aside from her path, she hurried after the swift-footed child.

Lela shuddered as she entered the locality of her former abode. The wretchedness and filth around her seemed to have increased in her absence, the houses appeared more dilapidated, and the heaps of rubbish and broken potsherds strewn before them had apparently increased a hundredfold.

Tottering, reeling drunkards, miserable women, beggars and vendors, elbowed the pedestrian on all sides. There was no lack of quarrelling and abuse, oaths and blows, while the emaciated children supplied a shrill chorus of shouts and screams.

"Is it possible that I could ever have existed in this Tartarus?" thought Lela, as she passed rapidly into the dark passage which admitted her into the small court where Mother Septimia had her humble dwelling. The little peristylium was entirely deserted, and appeared to be abandoned to ruin. Grass and rank weeds sprang up from the fissures in the broken pavement, and clustered abundantly about the square tank, full of stagnant rain-water, which occupied the centre of the area. The *débris* of a broken statue were scattered around. Here lay a disfigured head, and there a dismembered hand. The pedestal was still standing, but

it was covered with a shining moss, and at the base lurked a hideous toad, contemplating with brilliant, reflective eyes the desolation of its surroundings. There were several small cubicula opening into the court, but the portals were all closed and barred, save that of Mother Septimia. It stood a little ajar, and Lela pushed it open, lifted the ragged veil within, and entered quickly.

The den, for it was nothing else, was without an occupant. There was a rotten couch and a great stone which had once served for a seat, but no other sign of habitation.

The dancer had been caught in a trap!

With a cold shudder passing through her frame, and almost paralyzing it, with an ashen-coloured face and set teeth, Lela turned to seek some means of escape, or to suffer—she knew not what.

As she re-entered the peristylium, a loud, hoarse laugh greeted her appearance, and she saw the hunchback Calvus standing before the entrance to the passage, which he had secured.

"*Salve*, my pretty nymph," cried he. "Did you think you had escaped my clutches? No, by the gods, I have long arms, clever fingers. I can seize my prey when I will. Your beauty has vastly improved since we met last."

Lela vouchsafed no reply. She appeared to be measuring mentally the height of the small peristylium. The square aperture in the roof was about five feet from the top of the pedestal.

"Well, O Lela!" exclaimed Calvus, when he thought he had given his victim sufficient time to consider her answer, "what say you, my entrapped goddess? Will you listen to the faithful Calvus now? The gods

are kind,—they have betrayed thee into my hands, and, by their sacred heads, I will know what thoughts are in thy mind about my suit!"

"No good thoughts," retorted Lela; "I scorn thee—I hate thee—I loathe thee!" She stamped her foot as she spoke, and looked at the hunchback with flashing eyes. But the next moment all signs of her fury disappeared, and she said softly, "It is not right to think evil things even of an enemy. Forgive me, O Calvus; I have not yet learned to curb myself as I ought, but I will pray God to help me to check my passion when it rises, and pluck out my hatred. Do not anger me again, O Calvus. Let me go while my mood is gentle."

"Yes, yes," replied the ironsmith, in a wheedling tone; "you shall go—you shall go, when you have promised to wed—Calvus. It is true I am hideous, quite true;

but I have that bestowed away in my vaults which can make ugliness acceptable. Gold, Lela, gold—gold coins without number, precious vessels, treasures of jewels! Will you come and see them? It is dark and damp where they lie, but thou wilt not be afraid, and thou wilt not tell the secret, because thou wilt share the booty. Thou shalt finger them—turn them over and over. That is a sweet pleasure for thee. Come, O Lela. Once behold my possessions, and thou wilt not hesitate to pour out a libation upon the altar of Hymen, and then—then we will gather up our wealth and fly to a distant land, where we can wear a purple hem if so we will, and suffer no rebuke. Ha! ha! What a pleasant time we will have, thou and I, my queen—thou and I and the gold! Dost thou hear? What doest thou staring up at that morsel of sky? Come, I will lead thee to the storehouse of

my treasures. I will take thee in my arms."

"Not thou!" said Lela, suddenly casting aside her palla, gathering her robe into folds high above her ankles, and leaping back from the proffered embrace with a twinkle of mischief in her bright eyes.

"But I will—I will embrace thee!" exclaimed the hunchback.

"If thou canst catch me," replied Lela, dancing swiftly round the peristylium. "I never thought to foot it more, but see, I do—lightly, easily as ever. The want of practice hath not clogged my speed. It must be the expectation of riches which elates me so. Eh, Calvus?"

She spoke her sentences at intervals, for Calvus chased and dodged her round the narrow court. His energy was extraordinary, but his strength soon began to flag, and he was panting violently for breath.

"Sit down," shouted Lela, laughing merrily. "Sit down while I finish my dance. Sit down in the farthest corner out of my way, and by-and-by I will listen to thee! Good Calvus, kind Calvus!"

The flattered hunchback immediately proceeded to do as he was desired, and the moment he was seated upon the ground, Lela sprang upon the pedestal and from thence through the aperture in the roof.

Calvus struggled to his feet, still panting, with a loud, hoarse cry. Once upon the roof, Lela would find her escape easy, for there were steps behind the cubicula which led down into the street.

Lela peeped through the aperture.

"I will see thy treasures another time, O Calvus!" said she, wickedly. Then she disappeared.

Calvus was like a madman. He swore terrible oaths, he foamed at the mouth, he

made his fingers bleed in his haste to unbar the portal which led into the passage, and he ran wildly through the street to the house of a rogue who was more clever than himself—one Favorinus,—and to him he told the story.

"Well," replied Favorinus philosophically, "it cannot be helped. A stratagem must fail sometimes, and when that happens it is folly to spend strength in curses."

"I will kill her, the witch!" cried Calvus. "I will have my revenge, O Favorinus. All my love is turned to hate by this trick. I will kill her!"

"Then you will have but half a revenge," remarked Favorinus; "for when she is dead you cannot plague her any more. If I were in thy place, I would kill them who had bewitched her—for," he added with a sneer, "she must be bewitched who will not wed Calvus."

"Bewitched!" echoed Calvus stupidly.

"Ah, certainly," replied Favorinus. "No doubt she is under the spell of some of those Nazarenes. There is no end to the evil they do, both publicly and privately."

"To be sure; her mistress, Quintilia, is a Christian," remarked Calvus.

"That is it," said Favorinus, nodding his head with an air of decision. "That is the secret of her refusal. Let us once extirpate this vile race, and things will go on as they did before Christus was heard of in Rome. It is a new thing for a maid to despise gold. Get rid of the Christians, O Calvus, and you can wed Lela and increase your treasures. Let them live, and we shall presently be compelled to rest satisfied with our own goods, and to feel the effects of their machinations in the thwarting of our passions."

"Death to the Christians!" growled

Calvus. "I will make them smart for the loss of Lela, when I get the opportunity."

"Yes, yes; we will make them smart," echoed Favorinus, "presently—presently. Decius has knocked down old Fabian, and the rest will soon follow, for there need be no lack of informants while we live. It is a trade that will pay, O Calvus. Hear what was whispered in the town to-day. Decius would rather lose twenty sesterces than one Christian."

CHAPTER XI.

A PURPOSE FRUSTRATED.

VALARIA, Quintilia, Iope, and the dancer Lela were speedily on the road to Laurentum, accompanied by Laberius and a strong escort of the physician's Syrians.

Then came quiet days,—hours of industry and hours of idleness in the cool courts, pleasant walks and conversations in the shadowful garden, sports with the children of Sulpitius along the marble colonnades, and merry rambles on the beautiful sea-shore. All the anxieties which had been aroused were lulled to rest by the tranquility of the moment.

Quintilia strove to reawaken her brother's

interest in Christianity. It seemed to have waned of late, or was perhaps affrighted by the martyrdom of Fabian.

But Laberius waived the subject until his sister asked him the reason with tears in her eyes. Then he answered in a low, faltering voice, "At present I can think of nothing but Iope."

Quintilia started.

"I love Iope," said Laberius, smiling at his sister's surprise; "and when her mourning for Aulus Camillus is past I will fling myself at her feet."

Quintilia answered not. She plucked the bell flowers which hung over her head, and scattered their petals before the wind.

"The Lord," said she to herself, "would bring my brother to His throne by a way that I wot not of."

Perceiving how thoughtful she was, Laberius left her in the arbour and strolled

away in search of Iope. There was a sound of laughter in the distance to direct his course, but as he drew nearer to the spot from whence it appeared to proceed, it suddenly ceased, and he knew not which way to turn. He had approached the boundary of the garden, and the shore and the sea were before him—the tide out, the water calm and transparent as glass, the ship of the Sophist at anchor in the sand.

The peaceful and beautiful scene arrested his attention. He sat down upon the nearest rock to contemplate the natural picture, and to think or rather dream of Iope.

This bewitching occupation lasted a long time. The tide had turned, and the ship was riding the waves, when he was awakened from its spell by a strange voice.

The master of the ship, fired with a desire for news, had at last ventured to address him.

"Noble Flamen," said he, "know you aught of the doings in Rome?"

"What should I know?" replied the young priest with some sharpness. He was annoyed at the interruption. "I have been absent from the city these seven days past.'

"And I since the accession of Decius," answered the sailor. "For what purpose the gods only can tell."

"Have you not seen your patron?" asked Laberius.

"Ay, certainly," answered the ship-master; "but it is no time to ask Claudius Bromius questions when his mouth is full of them. It is, 'Art thou in good trim? Is *everything* ready for an immediate flight? and goes so-and-so right for a sudden voyage?' all the time he is on board. Then he must needs overhaul the whole tackle and weary us to sickness with a

repetition of orders. Never was man so changed as our patron. He has become as pale as a shrimp, and as fierce as a sea-dog. No longer can he make a jest, and his inclination for sesterce-giving is gone—worse luck for his poor slaves, who got more out of him in alms than in just payments. By the trident of Neptune, I will stake a whole year's incomings that his head is turned by a woman at last!"

"Not improbable," said Laberius, laughing.

"Say not his friends so in Rome?" asked the sailor, piloting round to his first question.

"I have not heard them," answered Laberius.

"Well, what is said in Rome?" inquired the shipmaster eagerly. "Is there nothing to set the tongues of the gossips to work or the hands of the mischievous to murder? What good or foul thing is bestirring?"

"Hatred against the Nazarenes," replied Laberius with reluctance. "It hath awakened into action at length, and the old Christian Fabian hath been struck down."

The sailor grunted his disapproval. "I have known many Christians," said he, "and I thought them no worse than other men. On shipboard they were better."

"Art thou one of the sect?" asked Laberius sharply.

"No, by the gods!" replied the man. "I have no time to take up a new religion."

As he spoke there was a shout from the ship.

"The patron! the patron!" cried the sailors, and turning his head Laberius saw a figure coming over the cliffs. The shipmaster hurried back to his duties, and the young priest, rising from his seat, went forward to meet the Sophist.

Claudius Bromius was approaching with

the haste of one who carried important news, and Laberius soon saw that his face was ashen pale. When they met, the Sophist tottered and almost fell into the arms of the young priest.

"O Laberius," he cried, enclosing the proffered hand in a feverish grasp, "this is a fortunate rencontre. I was about to steal into the garden and watch for a chance of seeing thee alone and in secret. The eagle threatens a swoop, and the prey must be numerous, and may include our most beloved ones if we do not remove them out of the way. An edict is published against the Christians, and a day of general sacrifice is appointed for all who are suspected of holding their opinions."

Laberius leant against the rock by which he was standing and gasped for breath.

"Quintilia is doomed if she remain here," he murmured with a groan; "and

Iope—Iope may fall with her—who can tell?"

"You have forgotten the ship," said Bromius. "On the high seas there will be a greater chance of safety."

"True, true," replied the young priest, recovering his composure. "There must be no delay. I will hurry to the villa and hasten their preparations."

"*Vale!*" answered the Sophist. "I pray thee, do not tarry after the moon is up."

"Have no fear," replied Laberius, as he disappeared among the trees in the garden.

All the sails in the good ship were ready to be unfurled at a moment's notice. Every man stood to his post, and a little boat waited by the shore for the wards of Plotinus.

It was very dark, but there were signs of the moon rising—streaks of white light amid the black clouds; and, alas! there

were also signs of a storm. The wind had suddenly arisen, and the water, lately so calm, was now agitated with a thousand waves, which rolled fiercely over the surface rapidly increasing in strength and height.

Claudius Bromius was sorely troubled. "Would our passengers had arrived!" he exclaimed anxiously.

"They had better remain upon the land," replied the shipmaster. "The next hour will be a wild one, and women would be in the way."

Forked lightning darted across the heavens as he spoke, and a loud clap of thunder bestirred all the echoes around.

"An angry sea is kinder to a Christian than an Emperor devoted to the national religion," remarked the Sophist.

"That is true, O patron," replied the master, as he sped away to look after the

man who had the management of the rudder.

Claudius Bromius leant over the side of the lurching ship in a very uneasy frame of mind. He knew not what to do. He was certain that Quintilia and Iope could not come over that seething water even if they ventured down to the shore. Should he go to them? He was about to decide that he would, when the storm began to rage with a terrible fury. He was obliged to cling to the mast for support, and the mast shook as though it would loosen his hold. Down came the rain like a waterspout, drenching him to the skin, while the thunder roared incessantly, and the lightning flashed hither and thither, scudding over the wild water like a fiery serpent, and darting towards the ship as though it would strike her bulwarks.

"The gods have been kind to delay the

advent of thy friends," cried the shipmaster as he ran past the Sophist.

"It is so," thought Claudius Bromius, as the ship rocked to and fro in her endeavours to break free from her moorings.

The lightning continually lit up all the length of shore, and the Sophist saw the sailor in charge of the boat standing upon a small rock watching the distress of the ship. He was probably calculating its chances of weathering the storm.

"I wish I stood by his side," thought Claudius Bromius. "I do not fancy a struggle for life in this tumultuous sea."

Nevertheless he had made up his mind to take such a fate bravely if it had to be endured, for he was a fearless man.

Suddenly he perceived a female figure standing alone upon the sands. Her long hair and her white garments were streaming in the high wind.

"O patron, it is a shade!" cried the master of the ship, approaching the Sophist with a white face and trembling limbs. "It comes to foretell our fate. The ship is doomed, and we shall all perish."

"Folly!" answered Bromius, laughing in spite of the uneasiness which the unexpected appearance had caused. "See there; she speaks to the sailor, she gets into the boat."

The next flash of lightning showed the boat tossing midway between the ship and the shore.

"O ye gods!" cried Bromius in alarm. "It is Lela who approaches. What can have happened that she should brave such a passage?"

But for a protecting Providence the little boat must have been swamped on its short voyage. Clinging to the side of the ship with all his strength, Claudius Bromius

leant over it and listened with suspended breath and fast-palpitating heart for the death-scream of the dancer.

Meanwhile the sailors threw out their weighted ladder of ropes and made it fast for the ascension of their comrade and his companion.

In a few moments some one was coming fleetly up the side of the ship, and soon Lela appeared. She leaped almost to the side of the Sophist.

"Claudius Bromius," she exclaimed, catching hold of him for support, "the Almighty hath seen fit to frustrate your purpose."

"It will be calm to-morrow," answered the Sophist, thinking the dancer made reference to the storm. "They will come to-morrow."

"No," said Lela. "They cannot; the house is surrounded with soldiers."

Claudius Bromius was betrayed into the

utterance of a sharp cry. Loosing one of his hands from its grasp upon the ship's side he smote his breast like one making a sore lamentation.

Lela strove to comfort him. "Hist!" said she, "hist! All things come to pass for our good in the end. Quintilia was not alarmed; she only smiled."

"How did it happen?" gasped the Sophist.

"I will tell thee if thou art quiet," replied Lela. "We were watched. The spy Favorinus hath observed all our movements since we came to Laurentum. God forgive him for his purchased enmity!"

"I will plunge a dagger into his false heart!" exclaimed Claudius Bromius fiercely. "I will hew a way through the soldiers for the escape of Quintilia."

"Thou dost speak wildly," answered Lela. "Thou art raging like the wind and the sea."

"That is true, O Lela," said the Sophist, striving to compose himself. "But what shall I do?—what shall I do?"

"I will tell thee in the morning," whispered Lela. "Now be still, and let me pray for our preservation."

"Also for theirs," murmured the Sophist, thinking of Quintilia and Iope, but most of the former.

So listening to the contention of the elements they passed the hours until daybreak, when the storm abated. A little later the wind had sunk, and the waters were restored to their usual serenity. Claudius Bromius and Lela immediately landed and went towards the villa.

It was deserted.

At the first streak of dawn Laberius had been compelled by an order from the Emperor to escort his sister and his cousin back to Rome.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DAY OF TRIAL.

THE Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill was adorned for a festival. It towered above the sacred groves, crowned with innumerable flowers, ornamented with oak and olive branches. Its long façade, its altars, its statues, its fountains, were wreathed with brilliant garlands, the fragrance of the rarest blossoms mingled with the fragrance of incense. The golden gates shone behind the Athenian columns of polished Pentelican marble, and the bronze gilt tiles on the broad low roof emitted a radiance like a red furnace. A double row of white-robed priests edged the lofty flight of steps, and

in their midst, in the portico, stood the Emperor,—the Pontifex Maximus,—habited in the richest vestments of his sacred office. Above his head was a silken canopy besprinkled with jewels. Beneath his feet was a carpet of the most magnificent Babylonian embroidery, and before him surged an apparently boundless sea of Roman people come to do homage unto the image which he had set up.

In the centre of the vast area before the temple stood the temporary altar, upon which each individual in the mighty audience was expected to pour a libation. Decius was determined to know the sheep from the goats in his flock.

Motionless as a statue, stern as a judge, he looked down upon the people with a contemplative expression. His penetrating glance seemed to single out each person and read the thoughts which passed through

his mind. Many shrank from the serpent-like observation, and flushed. The bravest among the throng had a sensation of awe. All felt as if they were placed under a spell. The rustling of the leaves in the sacred groves was the only sound to be heard.

The music of the cymbal and the double flute at length disturbed the silence which prevailed. The harp and the pipe repeated the strain, and all the echoes of the Campagna were awakened to swell the chorus which succeeded. Then came a momentary pause, followed by a blast of trumpets which announced that the Emperor was about to address his subjects.

"Romans," he said, "children of Romulus, of Numa, and the ancient rulers of the city, it is a great and urgent business which has brought us hither to-day. For a thousand years we have been protected by the gods. Our fathers were devoted to the service of

their altars; they were men of simple manners, of pure lives, of firm purpose, and their piety has become famous throughout the world. While we honoured the gods they honoured us. The temples are the strongholds of the Empire. It is our religion which binds us to heaven. As Egypt depends on the Nile for its fertility, so does Rome depend on the gods for its prosperity. In these latter days men have ceased to believe in the gods, and with this apostasy from the ancient faith there has come a corresponding departure from the morality and ancient customs of our ancestors. No man now bows to authority. The ancient traditions are despised. Every man follows his own judgment. He believes what he likes, worships what god he chooses, disregards authority and the voice of catholic antiquity. There has risen among us a new sect who worship not the gods of the Empire,

and have forsaken the old ways. They are atheists as to the gods, men of perverse minds, neither knowing truth nor loving it. They spurn the sacrifices of the altar, despise the consecrated temples, and refuse the services of the priests, who are the channels of the divine gifts to men. This sect of rebels and fanatics, guided by knaves and incendiaries, have forsaken the old Roman faith, and therefore the gods have sent unnumbered calamities on the city and the Empire. We have met to-day to propitiate the angry gods,—to avert their vengeance for this apostasy from the ancient religion. We order and decree that every Roman shall burn incense on this altar, and whoever refuses this service to the gods of the Empire shall be given over to the public executioner, or be torn to pieces by wild beasts in the amphitheatre."

When the Emperor had ceased speaking

the great white bull with gilded horns was slain. Innumerable ceremonies attended the sacrifice and its preparation for the altar. No minutiæ of the ritual could be omitted when Decius himself directed the movements of the priests, and not until a cloud of incense spread a mysterious veil before his elevated figure did the Emperor cease to perform the functions of the Pontifex Maximus. Then he suddenly dropped his priestly vestments, and appeared in his purple robes with a golden eagle at his feet,—the personification of the god whose statue stood on his right hand.

"Sacrifice to Jupiter and the genius of the Emperor," cried the chief of the priests, and a herald shouted the command until it had been repeated in every ear throughout the multitude.

Those who were suspected of being Christians were called to the sacrifice by

name. Some approached the unholy offering with a countenance so plainly expressive of fear both to sacrifice and to die, that the populace who thronged around derided them. Others advanced with more alacrity, carrying their boldness so far as to avow that they never had been Christians. In them was the saying of our Lord verified, "How hardly can a rich man enter the kingdom of heaven!" As to the rest, part held out until the manacles were fastened on; others endured a certain amount of torture, and then gave in; and some stood steadfast in their faith, made strong by the Lord, to whom they lifted their voices in prayer.

The wards of Plotinus awaited their summons under the guardianship of Paulinus and Valaria. The philosopher himself was not far off, but he appeared unconscious of their presence. Swathed in her veil, Iope

clung to Quintilia with every sign of alarm and distress, but Quintilia appeared to be unmoved, although her face was paler than usual. Now and again she whispered encouragement to Iope.

"It is a grand scene, O little one," she said to her cousin, "but it is a wicked one. When thou art called to take thy part in it, remember that thy part is to refuse the sacrifice. Think of the story which I told thee last evening. Dost thou remember it—the story of the golden calf which was set up in the wilderness? The Lord was angry with the Israelites for their idolatry, and He punished them. Let us not excite His wrath by submission to the tempter. It is better to obey God than man."

"Tut, tut, O Quintilia!" interposed Paulinus. "It is nothing to pour out a libation or drop a pinch of incense on an altar. It is only an act. The gods are

nothing to me. I neither honour their images nor believe in their existence, but Decius commands me to perform a certain ceremony before one of the national deities, and I obey him. Do not frighten Iope into a refusal, or her punishment will be upon thy head. Foolish maiden that thou art! I fear it is in thy mind to cast thyself into the pit. Do not drag others with thee in thy fall."

The physician's heart was heavy, though he spoke lightly. Quintilia smiled.

"They call thee, O brother," exclaimed Valaria, who had been watching the spectacle with such interest that she had quite forgotten her charges.

"Ready," answered the old physician with promptitude, and turning to the wards of Plotinus he added gaily, "I go to set you an example, O maidens." Then he strode hastily towards the altar and emptied the

whole of the contents of the incense-box upon the flames in his anxiety to conclude the matter. "Physicians are not fond of religious ceremonies," he said, laughing. "Our patients usually require our attention most during the hours of service, and so we do not get the time to cultivate a taste for them."

Valaria followed her brother. Such an opportunity for the public display of her matronly charms and splendid garments seldom occurred, and the widow was consequently in high spirits. The anxiety she felt about the behaviour of the wards was set aside for the moment by a desire to show off the glories of a new palla to the best advantage. With a slow step and great dignity of carriage she moved forward, spreading out its border of golden embroidery and exhibiting her jewels. Her large, well-rounded arm was lifted with

studied grace to pour out a libation, and she returned triumphantly to her place amid a buzz of admiration.

But her sunshine was suddenly clouded by the reluctance of Quintilia and Iope to accompany the philosopher to the altar.

"Why should we hesitate? Why should we not honour the images of the gods? They are all emanations from the One," he said. "All the gods are parts of the one God. Why should we not do honour to the image of one of these parts? I had not done it of myself, but it is the will of Decius. Come, O my children." And he took their hands.

There was a solemn silence among the multitude as the great philosopher led his beautiful wards forward. A rumour of their being Christians had gone abroad, and it was now to be proved. The result was

expected with intense but suppressed excitement. Decius himself felt a deep interest in the scene. He drew nearer to the altar, that he might hear more distinctly every word which was uttered.

"Sacrifice!" said the chief priest to Plotinus, and the philosopher poured out the libation, and cast incense on the little dancing flames with a solemnity which astonished all.

"Sacrifice!" said the priest to Quintilia; but she drew back with a haughty refusal.

"Why not?" whispered the priest, anxious to preserve her. "It is the command of the Emperor, and why should it be wrong thus to acquire favour with the rulers among men, since these have been exalted to authority over the things of this world? Therefore, when it is required of you to swear by the Emperor among men there is

nothing very mischievous in it, for whatever you receive in life you receive from him."

But Quintilia still refused.

"Sacrifice!" commanded the Emperor sternly. "Put the cup and the incense-box in her hands, and compel her to the offering."

"That shall not be, O most august Emperor," replied Quintilia with dignity. "I will not offend my God by the adoration of an idol. I am a Christian."

"Philosopher," exclaimed Decius impatiently, "have you no control over your wards? Will you see this obstinate maiden led to a prison without an effort to dissuade her from her folly?"

Plotinus answered not a word.

"Sacrifice!" thundered the Emperor.

A deep colour rushed into the cheeks of Quintilia, heightening her beauty. She trembled before the anger of the Emperor,

but she was not moved to alter her decision.

At a signal from Decius several of the Prætorian guards advanced and stood by her side.

"Choose," said Decius; "choose between the sacrifice and the chains."

"The chains," replied Quintilia in a loud, clear voice. "I will not deny my God."

Then they fastened them about her wrists and ankles.

A loud scream rang through the assembly, finding its echo among the Seven Hills. It was uttered by Valaria.

"Hist!" growled Paulinus. "The maiden hath done nobly. Even death will not pain her while she hath that faith in her God."

Iope was called to the sacrifice, and the shout of derision which followed the refusal of Quintilia to pour out a libation was

suddenly hushed. The Greek maiden was half-unconscious. The conduct and arrest of Quintilia seemed to have bewildered her senses. Clinging to the breast of Plotinus she buried her face in his toga, and paid no attention to the priests when they addressed her.

"Sacrifice, O my child," whispered Plotinus, gently disengaging the arms which were fastenend round his neck, and lifting the drooping head. "Sacrifice, O my child," he repeated, placing the incense-box in her hand; but she dropped it without knowing that she did so.

Laberius, hitherto restrained from interference by his brother priests, could no longer control himself.

"I love her!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Let me go. Let me speak to her. She will certainly listen to me."

At this appeal they loosened their hold on

his robes. He rushed into the area, and hurried towards the altar. Indifferent to the presence of the Emperor, and the populace, he flung himself at the feet of Iope.

"O Iope," he exclaimed, with passionate vehemence, "sacrifice for my sake. O my beloved, do not hesitate. Pour out a libation; sprinkle a little incense upon the altar of the great Jupiter, I beseech thee."

Iope shrank from his touch, and returned his impassioned gaze with a frightened look.

"I cannot," she said, "I cannot. I dare not."

He lifted her hand and covered it with kisses. It mattered not how many witnesses there were to the expression of his love in that solemn hour. "O Iope," he cried, with a wild voice, "Quintilia hath smitten me sore, but wilt thou make the fatal wound

reach even to the heart? Sacrifice, Iope, or I die."

He lifted the fallen incense-box, placed it in her little hand, and held it there.

Iope neither resisted nor spoke. She looked like one in a dream.

"It is an assent," remarked the officiating priest, willing to end the scene. And in another moment Laberius had caused Iope to make the offering.

As the flames shot upward with a new vitality, Balus the Christian deacon rushed out of the multitude into the space before the altar.

"O unhappy maiden," cried he with a loud voice, "what hast thou done?"

But Iope heard him not. She had fainted.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRIAL OF BALUS.

THE following day all those who had refused to sacrifice were brought before the Proconsul for examination, and the fanatic Opimius proceeded to denounce them with a vehemence which rivalled that with which the deacon Balus had uttered woes on the Empire if it continued in its iniquity. "Antiquity," said he, "is the high priestess of truth. The Roman worship has existed since the days of Romulus. What is there more venerable than the authority of the ancient faith? What is there more beautiful than to adore the gods whom in our youth we were taught to fear? Surely it is a

daring audacity to sit in judgment on the actions of the gods. O foolish Christians, to exalt your reason above the universal reason, to measure the divine by the human, and to refuse to believe the mysteries because they are above your understanding. Ours is the old faith, yours is but of yesterday. Look at the ancient temples that adorn the Seven Hills. In them our fathers worshipped ; they are witnesses to the faith of the ancient Romans, and only a religion like ours could have reared such fabrics to the honour of the gods. Behold the piety of Rome ! Avaunt, Christians ! Unbelievers in our gods, despisers of our worship, destroyers of the Empire, where was your religion before Jesus Christ ? It is not more than three centuries since it began. We can name its beginning and we can point to its end. The catholic religion of the Roman Empire stands fast for ever, but you have

so little faith even in your own God that you have made for Him neither temple, nor altar, nor image. You worship nothing but that wretched cross, the symbol of the punishment your unbelief deserves."

Balus had often heard a similar discourse from one or other of his pagan enemies, and he disdained to make any reply.

Opimius frowned at his silence, and proceeded to read his accusation.

"You are accused of refusing to sacrifice on the altar of Jupiter," said he, "and of being a ringleader of the impious sect called Christians."

"I know of no impiety of which the Christians are guilty," said Balus.

"Then sacrifice to the gods," said the Proconsul, pointing to a temporary altar which had been erected at the base of his elevated seat.

"To devils, you mean," answered the

deacon. "The gods of the heathen are no gods."

"Hear his blasphemy!" shouted Favorinus, the spy, who was among the crowd of onlookers. "Is it any marvel that wars and plagues and pestilence devour the Romans?"

"Down with the Atheists!" cried Opimius. "They bring the fury of the gods upon our heads."

"Down with the Atheists!" echoed the multitude, who had crowded into the hall of justice to see the prisoners; and the noise they made was so great that the lictors had much difficulty in subduing it. But for the assistance of the guards, their authority would have been set at nought, and the Christians torn to pieces.

"Christians are not Atheists," said Balus, as soon as silence was restored. "We worship the same God who was worshipped

by Heracleitos and Socrates, by Plato and Zeno, by Epictetus, by Cicero, and by Antoninus. All who live according to reason are Christians. We worship that God who is revealed by reason and manifested in Christ."

"He lies!" shouted Favorinus, "he lies! The Christians have no god. They are a set of profane wretches drawn from the very dregs of the populace."

"We are proud of the name of Christians," said Balus, "or Chrestians, as some rightly call us, which, in the Greek language, means persons that are good and kind, that love each other, bear each other's burdens, and look for no recompense till the resurrection of the just."

"This is not what I have heard of thy sect," said the Proconsul, who had listened to the discussion between the Christian and the spy with pretended patience.

"Because you have not heard the truth," answered Balus.

"Favorinus knows the truth," said the Proconsul. "He has been in your assemblies, and Cirtensis has exposed your practices in the Feasts of Love, which, like all evil deeds, are done in the night."

"Our lives are pure, our manners uncorrupt," replied the deacon, warming. "In our assemblies we worship the One God with prayer and praise, and we seek to promote peace and goodwill between man and man."

At this Favorinus cried out, "The arrant knave! Balus for peace and purity! Let him speak of the dog and the candlestick, and how the midnight revels are managed. They call each other 'brother' and 'sister,' forsooth, yet they murder infants, and under fair names have a Feast of Love. The only image in their assemblies is an ass's

head, which they worship with dance and song."

"I know of no immoralities in the Christian assemblies," rejoined Balus, "and it is our boast that we have no image of anything that might be worshipped either in heaven or earth."

"Will you sacrifice?" demanded the Proconsul, who was becoming impatient. "We have no desire to see men put to death. It is but a small matter that is required. Offer incense but once, and you are released."

"And so," said Balus, "would my Master have been released had He chosen to temporize before His judges. But truth is better than life, and cowardice is worse than death."

"I forbid you to speak of Christus," said the Proconsul. "Your business now is to sacrifice to the gods of the Empire. You have deluded many thousands of the in-

habitants of Rome. Most of them are poor and ignorant. For an example and a warning to others I must punish you until you acknowledge the ancient catholic religion of the Roman Empire."

"I will never sacrifice to an idol," said the deacon with dignity. "I am a Christian."

"There are wild beasts in the amphitheatre," remarked the Proconsul.

"They cannot hurt me," replied Balus boldly.

"We can burn you with fire," said the Proconsul.

"There is a fire that burns with greater fury, and if I deny Christ I am in danger of that fire."

"We can crucify you," retorted the Proconsul.

"O joyful cross, I hail thee!" exclaimed the deacon, stretching forth his arms and clasping his hands together in the attitude

of adoration. "On thee was man's redemption laid, on thee my Master died; it is an honour too great for me to suffer as Christ suffered."

"Will you sacrifice?" repeated the Proconsul.

"Never!" shouted Balus. "I will never renounce Him who called me out of darkness into light. You may kill my body, but you cannot hurt Balus. I shall live when this flesh is decayed, and therefore I care nothing for death. I would rather go to God and Christ by the stroke of the sword, or through the mouth of the lion, than live in Rome ruled by tyrants who know not the meaning of justice."

"You talk like a madman," said the Proconsul.

"Down with the Atheists!" shouted the people again.

"Do you hear what the populace say?"

said the Proconsul to Balus. "They will not tolerate your sect. Sacrifice, I beseech you, and let me set you at liberty."

"I want no more liberty on earth," replied Balus, and he turned scornfully from the proffered incense.

"Your blood be upon your own head, then," said the Proconsul; "I wash my hands of it." And he ordered him back to the prison from whence he came, to await the pleasure of the Emperor.

Balus was led away rejoicing, and a rough multitude followed him with shouts of derision, but he regarded not their mockery, remembering that his Divine Master had been subjected to a similar affliction.

"They may hate and revile us," he said to the chief of the guards who accompanied him, "and their rulers may persecute us, but the religion of Christ will still progress. The more you cut us down the thicker we

rise. The blood of the Christian is like the seed you cast in the ground—it springs up again, increased a hundredfold. Your philosophers have taught virtue, we have practised it. Your philosophers have speculated, we have believed. Your philosophers have entertained the learned with dissertations on righteousness, we have gone out into the world and taught men to be righteous. I thank you again for your sentence, for when we are condemned by you, we are absolved by God."

Balus was placed in a small square dungeon beneath the Imperial Forum, and chained to a massive iron ring which was attached to the floor. There was only sufficient light admitted through a minute aperture in the roof to show the horrors of the apartment, and this was not unfrequently left closed for days together from the carelessness of the jailors. A rough stone,

designed to serve as a seat, and a jar of stagnant water, were the sole furniture of this dreadful place. The air was impregnated with bad odours, the walls were thickly garnished with the rankest specimens of fungi, and loathsome reptiles sped back to their concealments in the crevices of the broken pavement as the deacon entered.

"O man, you were a fool not to pour out a libation to the gods," remarked the jailor as he made fast the prisoner's chain to the ring in the floor. "Here, however," he added, "you must lie until you do; and to make you the more ready to assent, I am forbidden to give you bread except once in three days."

"I have the bread of life," answered Balus. "That will suffice me."

"Or pure water," continued the jailor.

"I have within me a well of water," replied the deacon.

"Then you will be put in utter darkness if you continue obstinate," said the jailor.

"Where Christ is, there is light," answered Balus. "There there is no need of the sun or the moon."

"But are you not afraid of torture?" questioned the jailor. "There are a thousand dreadful instruments to punish such as you."

"Not I, while Christ supports me," replied the deacon. "I rejoice in tribulations, and 'fill up in my flesh that which is behind in the afflictions of Christ.'"

The jailor laughed scornfully. "You talk very well," said he, "but I do not doubt we shall soon subdue your bold spirit. In two days more you will be brought before the Proconsul again, and we shall hear how you answer then."

He left the dungeon as he spoke, and Balus was left alone. He stretched himself at length upon the ground, rested his head

upon his arms, and began to think; but he was so weary, he soon fell asleep.

Then came to him visions of the days he spent in Palestine. Once more he walked upon the ramparts of Jerusalem and talked with Cornelius. Once more he heard the story of the crucifixion in sight of the scene where it had taken place. Then there sprang out of the earth a cross at his own feet, and from the east and the west there came soldiers bidding him prepare for his own death. At first he was startled, but the next moment his courage returned, his faith was strengthened, and a great joy took possession of his soul at the prospect of seeing the Divine Christus in His own kingdom. He cast himself before the cross, embraced it with his arms, and cried out, "O blessed tree on which I shall lay my sins! it is not I that shall die, but the death that is in me. Soldiers, come with your

hammer and your nails, crucify what is unjust. Kill this body of death, and I shall have true life."

As he spoke he thought the soldiers seized him and bound him to the cross, but he felt nothing, for a voice which he knew well was whispering in his ear, "Stand fast, O Balus, for I will not fail thee."

"And I will stand fast," echoed Balus, starting from his sleep,—"steadfast unto the end."

CHAPTER XVI.

IOPE'S REPENTANCE.

WHEN Iope awoke to consciousness she awoke also to repentance. Flinging herself upon the tesselated pavement of her chamber in the house of Paulinus, she wept bitterly, and refused to be comforted.

The old nurse Suppedia sat by her side, rocking her aged form to and fro. She had exhausted all her arguments to quiet the conscience of her charge, but her soothing words, her motherly embraces, had all been repulsed, and she knew not what to do. The weak eyes poured forth showers of tears upon the wrinkled hands which rested

upon her knees, as she waited impatiently for the arrival of Paulinus.

Presently he came and stooped tenderly over the prostrate figure of the young Greek. It was the third time he had done so since daybreak.

"Still here, Iope?" he whispered reproachfully. "Why not lie on thy couch, O my child? Come, let me lift thee. This is folly. Little one, I thought thee wiser."

"I thought myself wiser," murmured poor Iope, as she resisted the good physician's efforts to remove her from her lowly position. "Leave me alone, O Paulinus! I am not worthy to be touched. But I knew not what I did," she added with a moan. "I was tempted, I was bewitched. The eyes of Laberius fascinated me into doing the evil deed. Oh, how he looked at me! the look haunts me still; I cannot banish the memory of it."

She sat upright as she spoke, and covered her face with her hands.

"Iope," said Paulinus gravely, "thou wilt be sick if thou dost indulge such foolish fancies."

"I am sick," groaned the poor child in a smothered voice, "sick at heart; and if my heart is not cured I shall die; but thou canst not heal that, O physician."

Paulinus was silent, and Iope began to sob with renewed vehemence.

"God will not forgive me," she cried; "what shall I do?"

The physician drew a little phial from his bosom, poured the contents in a cup, and strove to persuade Iope to swallow the mixture, but she pushed it away with violence.

"I want nothing," she said, "only God's forgiveness."

Paulinus was perplexed how to act. He

sought out Valaria. The widow looked anxious and altered, and the usual care had not been bestowed upon the arrangement of her garments.

"I have no advice to give you, O brother," she answered shortly. "I almost wish Iope had not poured out a libation. The governor of the jail told me an hour ago that Quintilia has suffered no depression of spirits through her imprisonment. He heard her singing."

"Iope will die as certainly as if she had been condemned to death," said Paulinus, "if she continues in her present disposition. She is already exhausted by weeping, and I cannot induce her to take anything."

Valaria shrugged her shoulders. "The wards of Plotinus are a great responsibility," she remarked.

Paulinus returned to Iope and renewed his entreaties.

"My child," said he, raising her slight form from the ground and resting it in his arms, "why art thou in such terrible grief? Thou didst upset a little incense upon an altar, that was all."

"I have denied the true God," gasped Iope between her sobs, "just as His Apostle Peter denied Him. Peter repented, and the Lord forgave him, but I cannot ask for pardon, because my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth when I try to do so. If only Quintilia were here to help me!"

"I would she were!" replied Paulinus fervently.

"Hast thou seen her to-day?" asked Iope suddenly.

"No," answered the physician; "but I have heard of her. She is well, and I shall see her presently when she stands before the Proconsul."

Iope burst into a fresh paroxysm of tears.

"What will they do to her, I wonder?" cried she. "Quintilia will never sacrifice to idols, and she will be angry with me for doing so, although it was Laberius that tempted me. Alas, alas!"

"Then the sin, if there is a sin, lies on the head of Laberius," said Paulinus, catching at another straw of consolation.

Iope shook her head. "We are told to resist temptation," she answered. "It is I—I alone that am to blame. Thou canst not cast my burden on the shoulders of Laberius, for he meant only to be kind. I have fallen—fallen with Quintilia's words of warning echoing in mine ear, and my heart is broken with repentance. Thou canst not comfort me, O kind physician. None but Quintilia can assuage the storm which rages in my breast."

"Why should she not see Quintilia?" thought Paulinus. "There can be no harm

in a meeting, even if they should talk of Christus."

Then he put his thought into words.

Iope leaped to her feet with a cry of joy. "Wilt thou take me to her?" she exclaimed.

Paulinus smoothed his long white beard with a gentle movement.

"Aroused," he said to himself. "That is well. I will take her to the judgment hall. The more public the meeting the briefer the interview, and therefore the less chance of a scene."

"Yes," he said aloud; "I will take thee to see her, but thou canst have but one hand-clasp, one embrace."

"Enough, enough!" answered Iope, and she hurried away to make her preparations.

Valaria was displeased with the idea. She remonstrated with her brother, and sought to dissuade Iope, but the new life which

it seemed to give the poor child, and the fear of the effect which disappointment might produce, at length induced her to consent. But when she had done so her mind was troubled. A strange feeling of alarm had taken possession of it. She knew not what she feared, but she trembled as she wrapped the palla about the young Greek, and kissed her brow. Iope clung to her weeping, and that added to her uneasiness.

In the meantime, while the deacon Balus was dreaming in his dungeon, Quintilia was standing before the Proconsul. She was the central figure of a group of Christian women, and she looked like their queen. Erect and calm, she appeared as if about to give judgment rather than to receive it. There was a quiet expression of patience and peace on her pale, beautiful face—an expectation in her eyes which made them shine with extraordinary lustre.

Her appearance produced a murmur of admiration, and the Proconsul whispered in the ear of Claudius Bromius, who stood by his side :—

"That woman looks like a goddess, and will act like one. There will be no forcing her to do a deed which she thinks against her conscience."

The Sophist made no reply. He was deadly pale, and he feared to speak lest he should betray the emotion which he felt.

"Will you sacrifice now, O Quintilia?" asked the Proconsul, when the accusation had been read.

"I will not sacrifice," she answered with dignity. "A hundred nights in prison would not make me alter my mind without a good reason."

"Where is Plotinus the philosopher?" demanded the Proconsul. "He shall remonstrate with his ward."

Plotinus stepped out of the shadow where he had been standing, folded his arms across his breast in his favourite attitude, and answered in a clear, loud voice, which was heard in all parts of the court:—

"I am here. What wouldst thou have of me? Speech? That will be in vain. They who are assured of the truth of what they believe cannot be reasoned out of their opinions, otherwise their opinions are not built upon a firm foundation."

Quintilia smiled approval.

"We do not require you to reason with the prisoner," replied the Proconsul. "Her opinions are nothing to us, but her conduct must be in accordance with the laws. She must recognise the national religion, or suffer punishment for her atheism. Bid her sacrifice."

The philosopher approached his ward and took her hand tenderly.

"Sacrifice, my child," said he. "I desire it, and thy friends desire it. Set aside thy scruples, and pour out a libation for the sake of those who love thee. Thou art young, and there is work for thee to do on earth."

But Quintilia still refused, gently yet firmly.

"God will not give the perjured work to do," said she.

"That is true," answered Plotinus, "but thou wilt not be perjured. Thou dost not deny the great God, as thou thinkest, by sacrifice to any of the gods, because—thou hast often heard me say it—all the gods are parts of Him. It is to a part of Him we would have thee do reverence on yonder little altar to Jupiter."

"There are no parts of God," replied Quintilia. "There is but one God, who created the heaven and the earth, the

sea and all that in them is; and He hath commanded us to make no images for our worship, but to worship Him alone."

"Callest thou not Christus a part of God?" said the philosopher.

"Very God," answered Quintilia fervently.

"No more very God than Jupiter and Mercury," said Plotinus. "He was purer than Jupiter in His life, but that was because He had more of the divinity of the One in Him. We have, all of us, more or less of the Divine essence within us, and he that hath most is not unlikely to be mistaken for God Himself. I honour Christus as I honour all good men, but I cannot believe that He is the One whom I seek. Love Christus, if thou wilt, as I love Him. Love Him for his purity, His goodness, and imitate His example, for He was a perfect man; but call Him not God—say not that He can save thee."

"He can save me," said Quintilia.

Plotinus was greatly distressed. The love of Christus was incomprehensible to him.

"I cannot understand this faith," he said at last.

"O guardian," exclaimed Quintilia, "I trust thou wilt soon. Thy philosophy is the ante-chamber to Christianity, and surely he that hath helped so many to the light shall hereafter enter it himself. He that will search diligently cannot fail to find in Christus the realization of thy perfect God."

"If it is so," said Plotinus, "how is it that I am not a Christian myself?"

"Because thou dost hesitate to knock at the door," cried Quintilia. "Thy mind is full of misgivings and conjectures. Knock, and it shall be opened unto thee, and when thou seest the light, all things shall be made clear."

"Will you sacrifice?" said the Proconsul, perceiving that the discussion would produce no favourable result. "If you persist in your refusal, I must order you to be tortured."

A cold shiver passed through the frame of the Sophist.

"Do what pleases thee," replied Quintilia with a smile. "Christ will give me strength to suffer for His name."

The Proconsul then passed sentence.

"Keep the prisoner in darkness," he said, "and give her no food for the space of three days."

Bromius recovered his composure. He had money, and the jailors of Rome were susceptible of bribery.

As the Proconsul uttered the last words a scream echoed through the building, and a slight female figure rushed forward towards Quintilia, but the guards would not allow her to pass through them.

"It is the maiden Iope, who sacrificed yesterday at the request of Laberius the priest," said Claudius Bromius to the Proconsul. "I pray thee, let her have speech with Quintilia." The permission was granted, and Iope flung herself into her cousin's arms and clung around her neck.

"O Quintilia," she whispered, "what shall I do? I am miserable. They made me sacrifice, and I repent. Ask the great God to forgive me."

The face of Quintilia became troubled.

"Child," she answered, also in a whisper, "what hast thou done? I was happy in the belief that thou wert bearing a cross also for His sake."

Iope wept violently.

"Arise and say thou art sorry for thy fault," said Quintilia sternly. "Acknowledge thyself a Christian now."

Iope still wept.

"Speak for me," she murmured in a stifled voice.

Quintilia needed no second bidding. Supporting Iope in her arms, she turned to the Proconsul, and said in a loud, clear voice, "Iope tells me that she was made to pour out a libation yesterday, and she now repents the sin. She acknowledges herself a Christian."

There was a murmur of surprise and indignation among the audience.

"Thou hast bewitched her," cried a voice.

"She is mad!" exclaimed Paulinus the physician, advancing to the front. "She is on the verge of a fever. Her mind is distracted by the situation of her cousin."

"Not so," replied Iope, summoning sufficient courage to lift her head from the bosom of Quintilia, and speak clearly. "I am a Christian, and it was wicked to pour out a libation before an idol."

"Praise be to God who hath given thee strength to speak the truth," exclaimed Quintilia, and she kissed the tearful face again and again.

"Be silent," said the Proconsul to Quintilia, and he ordered the guards to bring Iope forward before the temporary altar.

But she would not sacrifice. She turned away and hid her eyes.

"I have courage to refuse now," said she.

As they were trying to persuade her, Laberius suddenly appeared in the portico. He rushed forward towards the altar, flung himself at the feet of Iope, and began to remonstrate wildly.

"No, Laberius," said Iope; "thou canst not tempt me again."

"Then I will suffer with thee," cried the young priest with desperation.

"Flamen," said the Proconsul, "you speak

foolishly. Remember the dignity of your office."

The sensitive Laberius coloured, but he was not deterred from his vehemence. It had accomplished his object before, and it might do so again.

But Iope, supported by the presence of Quintilia and her encouraging smile, remained true to her word.

"Laberius," said Plotinus at last, "you had better stand aside, and let the sentence be passed." He was troubled and annoyed by the scene and the interest it excited.

Paulinus grasped the young man's arm.

"True," replied the Proconsul; "we have given more attention to this case than is usual." And he condemned Iope to the same punishment as Quintilia, but he decreed that they should be in different apartments.

"That is well," whispered Paulinus in

the ear of Laberius. "We shall have more influence with Iope in the absence of Quintilia." But Laberius looked at him as though he did not comprehend what he said.

Paulinus was alarmed. "Come," said he, "let us hasten home."

And Laberius accompanied him without a word.

Plotinus bade the maidens farewell.

"It is better to suffer," said he, "even unto death, than to speak against your convictions."

"I knew you would not condemn us, O guardian," said Quintilia, kissing his hand.

Then the guards led them away.

"Favorinus," said Calvus the ironsmith to the spy, as the prisoners passed by the place where they were standing, "what has become of Lela? Thou hast cheated me. Didst thou not let her escape that she might

seek to rescue her friends and ask our help?"

"Ay, ay," replied Favorinus, "but the time is not yet. Do not fear, O Calvus. She will appear soon, and we shall have our reward. Shall I tell thee a secret?—I saw her but an hour ago."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FATE OF IOPE.

THE third day of their punishment came, and the wards of Plotinus were again placed before the Proconsul, but they still refused to sacrifice.

"Such obstinacy is intolerable," said he. "Carry them back to their dungeons, and we will give them to the lions."

"If they do not cheat you out of your intentions by going to the land of shades," growled Paulinus, gazing with ill-suppressed emotion at the prostrate form of the half-senseless Iope, and observing with consternation the evident weakness of the stately Quintilia.

"I pray thee, let Iope come with me," petitioned Quintilia with great earnestness as the guards lifted up the young Greek; and the physician seconded her request.

The Proconsul was minded to refuse, but on consideration he gave his consent, lest Paulinus should deny him the benefit of his skill when it was required.

"Now I can die sweetly," said Iope when they were left alone in their gloomy apartment.

Quintilia lifted the small, pale face which reposed upon her bosom, and looked at it long and earnestly. "Yes, little one," she answered in a gentle voice, "thou wilt die sweetly. No fierce beasts will mangle thy fair limbs. God is merciful; He will take thee away from the evil to come. Would it were my fate also! But His will be done."

"Our enemies are cruel," murmured Iope.

"God forgive them!" said Quintilia. "They know not what they do."

"I would I had a morsel of bread," sighed the poor child presently. "I thought we were to have it now. Oh, it is terrible to feel these pangs of hunger!"

"Try to pray, my beloved one," answered Quintilia; and Iope did so. But she was soon tired of repeating the words which Quintilia uttered.

"I will sing to thee," said Quintilia; "at last, perchance, the lullaby words which thou lovest so well may hush thee to sleep."

"Perchance!" echoed Iope dreamingly. And Quintilia sang—

"Sleep, my beloved, sleep,
I press thee to my breast;
There pillow thou thy dear fair head,
And take thy needed rest.
Come, let me wipe away thy tears,
And banish every fear;
There is no danger in the night
When Christ the Lord is near.

"Sleep, my beloved, sleep,
I stir not from thy side;
Forget thy many griefs in sleep,
No ill can thee betide.
Angels are with me in the watch
Which I keep over thee;
And Christ keeps vigil o'er us both.
What better care could be?

"Sleep, my beloved, sleep,
In sleep the night speeds fast;
And for the moment all our griefs
Are in oblivion cast.
The balm sent down from heav'n accept,
To ease thee of thy pain;
Thus shall thy failing heart revive
To bear the cross again.

"Sleep, my beloved, sleep,
And see His face in dreams;
In spirit I will talk with Him
Until the morning beams;
And if so be in quiet sleep,
He takes thee from my breast,
How sweet 'twill be, my troubled one,
To have eternal rest."

"Even so," murmured the half-unconscious Iope, and disengaging herself from

the embracing arms of Quintilia, she disposed herself as comfortably as it was possible upon the straw which served them for a bed, and fell into a fitful sleep.

Quintilia watched by the young Greek, gazing upon her altered countenance, and listening to her uncertain respiration with strange ideas passing through her mind. "All this misery might have been saved," thought she, "if we had sacrificed to idols."

Presently the fastenings of the door were removed, and Quintilia turned hastily to see if the expected food was being brought. Disappointment awaited her. It was a visitor.

But a single ray of light penetrated the darkness of the dungeon, and it was not sufficient for Quintilia to distinguish the features of the man who entered. Probably it was some one come to renew the

arguments and remonstrances against her conduct.

She covered her face with her hands and murmured aloud, "Oh, my friends! they know not how they add to my trials."

"Quintilia."

It was not the voice of the philosopher or the physician.

Quintilia started to her feet with an exclamation of surprise and alarm. Physical weakness had decreased her power of self-control.

"Claudius Bromius!" cried she, "what brings thee here?"

"The desire to save thee," was the answer.

"My visitors all come with that excuse," answered Quintilia, smiling, "both friends and enemies. I am saved."

"Thou mayest think so," replied the Sophist bitterly; "but thou art lost to us, O

Quintilia. What will life be to some of us without thy presence?"

"Hush!" murmured Quintilia, and she pointed to the sleeping Iope.

Claudius Bromius lowered his voice, but he was not to be silenced.

"Life will be worthless to me without thee," continued the Sophist.

"Is it not worthless to thee now?" answered Quintilia quietly. "I am not thine, and I can never be. I told thee that long ago."

"Yet would I have thee to live," murmured Bromius; "for while thou breathest, hope liveth. O Quintilia, sacrifice for the sake of those who love thee. Why wilt thou die? For what dost thou die? Thou hast no certainty of the reward thou dost anticipate,—no more certainty than hath Plotinus the philosopher."

"Have I not?" replied Quintilia with a

smile. "Would I could make thee understand what certainty I have! That faith which has upheld all the Christian martyrs in their hour of trial now possesses me. God strengthen it, that I may emulate them when I walk through the fire!"

"But consider the terrors of the death thou adventurest," whispered the Sophist in tones of despair. "Will not the very publicity be a torture in itself? Canst thou bear the taunts and scoffs of a thousand enemies? Canst thou stand unmoved in the amphitheatre, branded as an Atheist, awaiting the ignominious fate of an erring slave?"

"Much more did my Lord bear with patience," answered the noble maiden.

"Think of the pain," continued the Sophist.

"It will soon be over," replied Quintilia quietly. "The wild beasts will quickly make an end of this frail body, and then,

O glorious revelation!" she murmured, clasping her hands, and looking upwards, "heaven will be opened unto me, and I shall see God as He is. I shall behold Christ sitting upon His throne. I shall meet Acatia, and know all the saints."

The Sophist smiled scornfully.

"The present is worth all thy expectations," he said. Then he flung himself suddenly at her feet, and cried out in a voice of suppressed agony, "O Quintilia, think what we might make it."

Quintilia rose to move further from him, but he snatched her hand and pressed it to his breast.

"I cannot lose thee," he whispered desperately, "I cannot lose thee."

Iope stirred in her sleep. "Food," she murmured, "food."

Claudius Bromius looked at her and started. "The three days are past," said

he. "Have they not brought thee food yet?"

"No," replied Quintilia. "But His will be done."

Bromius rushed to the portal and beat such a furious summons upon it that several of the guards came running with the jailor to see what was the matter.

"Where is food?" he cried. "Brutes that you are, to prolong the punishment of the maidens!"

"What matter their wants?" answered the jailor savagely. "They go to the lions." He brought, however, a bunch of grapes and a morsel of dry bread.

Iope had awakened, and was lying with her eyes wide open. She smiled and whispered her thanks when the Sophist offered her the fruit, but she did not take it. Her hands refused their office. He knelt down by her side and put the grapes

between her lips. He soaked the bread in the jar of water and fed her with it, ministering to her wants with all the tenderness of a woman; but his hands were trembling and his eyes were full of tears.

Quintilia watched him with a wondering admiration.

Suddenly Iope sat upright on the bed of straw and stretched forth her arms towards Quintilia.

"O beloved," she exclaimed, "kiss me. Christ has come."

Quintilia sat down quietly by her side and put her arms around her.

"Thou art happy, O little Iope?" said she.

"Happy," echoed Iope, resting her weary head upon her cousin's bosom; and she spoke no more.

At sunset Quintilia covered the pale, fair face with her own palla, and smiled as she

turned aside to eat the food which had been left.

"The Lord hath mercifully taken the lamb into His bosom," said she.

Claudius Bromius dashed the tears out of his eyes and rushed out of the dungeon in search of Laberius.

"Both shall not perish," he cried desperately. But he boasted wildly. Laberius, to whom he looked for help, was lying on his couch in a raging fever.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FORCE OF TRUTH.

THE Sophist left the house of Paulinus like a man stupefied by a sudden blow. The last hope of saving Quintilia appeared to be lost owing to the condition of her brother, and he now knew not in which direction to seek for the assistance he required. He passed down the Via Sacra towards his own house like a man moving in his sleep, and the expression of his face was altered by the mental pain which he suffered. As he entered the Latin Road a hand laid upon his arm arrested his progress, and startled him from the meditation which absorbed his mind.

Turning round sharply, he perceived Favorinus the spy.

"Begone, viper!" exclaimed Bromius, seeking to release himself from the grasp which held him as in a vice. "You and such as you bring trouble into the households of Rome."

"Hush," replied the spy, in a conciliating tone, while he glanced around suspiciously, although he had taken care not to address the patrician until he was assured of their privacy. "One must live. What will you give me to rescue Quintilia?"

Claudius Bromius started, and his face became ashen with rage. "Why dost thou mock me?" he asked, gnashing his teeth. "Thou that givest the Christians unto the lions, wouldst thou snatch them from their claws? Vile jester! Begone, or I strike thee prostrate at my feet."

Favorinus sprang back a pace or two, but

he was not daunted. "Why is my lord angry?" he inquired boldly. "Lela, the dancer, promised me a far different reception."

"Lela, the dancer?" echoed Claudius Bromius. "Did she send thee in search of me?"

"Ah, truly," replied the spy. "Lela it was. She is a good maiden, and would put bread into the mouth of a poor man. 'Favorinus,' said she, 'the patrician Bromius will pay thee for the rescue of Quintilia,' and therewith she propounded a scheme for the attempt. Artful maiden! she would save her mistress, but she has not the money to purchase the fulfilment of her wishes."

"Can I trust thee?" gasped the Sophist, catching at a straw.

"Gold will ensure fidelity for a season," replied the spy readily.

"True," answered Claudius Bromius; "I will listen to thy proposal."

"Not here," said Favorinus quickly. "Hath my patron no secret chamber in his house?"

And the Sophist led his strange companion to the little *cubiculum* where he had revealed his feelings to Laberius.

The spy looked to the security of the door fastenings, lifted a curtain which hung on one side of the apartment, and glanced out of the window before he could feel assured that he was in possession of the privacy which he desired, while the Sophist regarded his movements with a sarcastic smile.

"This is not a chamber in the ear of Dionysius," he said at last.

And Favorinus spoke with plausible words and with great assurance. He detailed the scheme which Lela had proposed for

the rescue of Quintilia. He did not seem to doubt its practicability, and he laughed at the obstacles which the Sophist said were in the way. The expectation of gain blinded the spy to the danger in which he would place himself by such an adventure, and he ceased not to urge the great probability of its success, until at length Claudius Bromius, perceiving that he valued gold more than life, saw no reason why he should not make an attempt.

Favorinus then bargained for the terms, and the matter being settled to his satisfaction, he was sent into an apartment to be refreshed by a collation such as he had never seen in all his life.

Relieved of his visitor, Claudius Bromius plunged into the deepest recesses of his garden, and hid himself in a grotto whose cool water seemed to invite him to rest. His bodily strength was nearly exhausted, and

his brow was feverish with excitement. The unexpected proposition of Favorinus had not lightened his heart, for he felt that he could place no reliance upon it. Flinging himself at full length upon the marble bench, he buried his face in his hands and banished the idea.

How foolish, he thought, are these Christians to provoke such sufferings by their attachment to their religion! and what is it but an opinion not different from the opinions of the philosopher? Conscience, a supreme good, a life in another world—what vain things are these for which men will sacrifice all life's joys, and even life itself! A spirit of madness seems to possess the Christians. Yes, madness it must be. What a strange mental perversion a man must have undergone before he can have such a conviction of the truth of his notions as to suffer for them! Nature's first law is self-preserva-

tion. The *Ego* is everywhere first. Every animal for itself. Every race for itself. Every man for himself. My own pleasure is dearer to me than the pleasure I can give to another. My own life is dearer to me than my preserving the life of another. Yet, O ye gods, what am I saying? Why have I tried to save Quintilia's life at the risk of my own? Do I contradict myself? No, I still sought pleasure; Quintilia's existence is my joy. It was myself I saved when I saved her. What do I say? Here is a problem I never before encountered. Was my risking my life for Quintilia selfish or unselfish? Was I following nature's law of self-preservation, or was I giving up myself for another? If I had known that I was certain to lose my life in rescuing hers, would I have been willing to have made the sacrifice? O gods, what spirit possesses me? I never thus reasoned with myself before. I never

before doubted the great principles of my own philosophy. And now I seem to think it possible that a man may sacrifice his life for another; give up his own will for the will of another, and from this there is but one step to dying for what one believes to be truth. And if I come thus far, then what I have called madness becomes philosophy. I am glad Plotinus does not know my thoughts. He would get such an advantage over me at this moment that I could never again defend the life of agreeable sensations. Yet I cannot drive away the fact that I have sacrificed myself for another's good, and when I look calmly into my own heart I am willing to give up some of my pleasures for the good of others. But again, O ye gods, if Nature herself intimates that this is the principle by which we ought to live, on which society ought to be founded, by which alone a perfect

society can exist, how have I been fighting against all the good that is in man, as well as all that is for the good of man!

A moment of seriousness has now come for Bromius. He feels for once the reality of life. He had spoken of experience as his guide, but now he has a deeper experience. The philosophy of agreeable sensations looks but a grey theory as the facts of man's nature rise up before him like a green and a golden tree. But what a nature! what complications! what need for a steady unprejudiced eye to look steadfastly at the facts! It is only in moments of seriousness, when the voice of passion is hushed, that the light falls upon them; and then it looks like light from heaven. Bromius reclined in the arbor. He sank deeper than ever in contemplation. This solitary musing was lifting him out of his former self. A new life was coming

to the birth. The waters of the grotto made rippling music, which sounded audibly through the perfect stillness of the scene.

Suddenly there was a rustling of the leaves, and a scroll fell at his feet. He looked around for the owner of the hand which cast it, but there was no one in sight; and he lifted the papyrus with some curiosity.

It contained some of St. Paul's Epistles. He read with attention the first part of that to the Romans.

"It tells us nothing but what we know," he murmured.

And he let the roll drop from his grasp with a dissatisfied gesture. It fluttered to the ground and remained open at these words:

"Not in rioting and drunkenness; not in chambering and wantonness. Not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof."

They caught the eye of Bromius and

arrested his attention. He started to his feet, and walked about the garden repeating them till they seemed to be ringing in his ears. Whence came the book he might guess, but he did not know. Had he believed in angels he might have said that it was sent by an angel, but he doubted not that it came from the hand of some Christian—some angel in human form.

The next moment Lela appeared. She placed her hands upon his, and looked earnestly into his face.

"The time has come," said she. "Thank God. It was the Spirit of God moved me to follow thee into the garden, to watch thee, and to read thy thoughts."

"Yes," replied Bromius; "I think the time has come. I have been struck as with a flash of lightning by the strange feeling which possesses me. Perhaps I may die with Quintilia."

Lela smiled mysteriously.

CHAPTER XVII.

TO THE LIONS!

THE games in the amphitheatre were over, and the vast arena was being prepared for the massacre of the Christians.

Every eye in the mighty audience was turned to observe the expression on the countenance of Plotinus the philosopher, but he showed no unusual emotion. His face was certainly paler, almost ashen, but his smile wanted not its habitual sweetness when he acknowledged the salutations of the senators, among whom he had taken his place.

"The Christians will meet their deaths like cowards," remarked a young senator,

leaning towards him. "They will make no resistance, but stand like dumb cattle and receive their fate."

"They will meet it like heroes and philosophers," added an older man, anxious to spare the feelings of Plotinus. "Why should they struggle vainly against an inevitable destiny? The gladiators fight with a hope of overcoming their antagonists, but the Christians are doomed, and they are right not to indulge the spectators of their sufferings with even a feint of resistance."

"Terrible to die in such a fashion," murmured another speaker.

"We can die but once," answered Plotinus, who had not hitherto spoken.

"Plotinus," said the old senator in a whisper, "art thou so indifferent to the fate of Quintilia?"

Plotinus stirred uneasily. "The gods will it," he said at length.

"Could she not have been saved?" asked the friend anxiously.

"At a cost that was not worth life," answered the philosopher.

As he spoke the doomed procession filed into the arena, and marched solemnly round the great circle, marshalled by a company of gladiators. In all there must have been about a hundred persons,—men, women, and children. Balus the deacon walked first, and as he moved forward he sang in a loud sonorous voice the inspiriting words of a triumphal hymn. The heathen raged with ten thousand noisy tongues, but he was not to be silenced. Their clamour seemed rather to increase his energy. His hallelujahs sounded clear and distinct above the din of the excited populace, and the hearty response of the fervent chorus found its echo far away among the distant hills.

Suddenly the hymn ceased, and the pro-

cession, forming into a semicircle, came to a pause before the throne of the Emperor. Quintilia stood in the midst, her hands folded meekly upon her breast, her gaze fixed upon the blue sky, which was shining through the aperture in the awning, her beautiful countenance illumined by the sunlight. Her attitude and her expression discovered the perfect peace and fearfulness which elevated her mind, and smiles flitted about her lips as though she replied to the invitations of angels hovering over her head. An equal serenity and a hope as encouraging appeared to possess and sustain her companions, but the radiancy of their expression in the beautiful Quintilia was so pre-eminent and mysterious that she was, as it were, transformed into a being of another world.

Decius was moved. He signalled for silence, and commanded the guards to bring

Quintilia near. She was too beautiful for the arena, and he determined to save her if if he could.

"Quintilia," he said, rising from his throne and bending forward over the front of the parapet that he might address her the more effectually, "can you be so foolish as to cast away life for a mere fantasy? Sacrifice, and live."

Quintilia shook her head. "The gift of all thy empire would not make me sacrifice, O Imperial Decius," she replied.

The Emperor frowned, but he began to reason with the maiden in the most insinuating accents.

"Consider," said he, "what you would cast away: the prospect of a long and healthful life, wealth and nobility,—all the best gifts of the gods."

"Which are as dust compared with the treasure of heaven," answered Quintilia.

The Emperor summoned Plotinus.

"Philosopher," said he, "have you no arguments to convince this maiden of her folly?"

"They have all failed," was the mournful reply.

"And so you resign her with a Stoical resignation to the fate of obstinacy," said the Emperor, with a slight accent of satire.

"She values her religion more than her life," said the philosopher quietly, "and therefore she is right to defend it. Death at its worst is but a sharp pang that sets the soul free from its prison."

"Stand aside," commanded Decius impatiently. "We will try the effect of blood on this decision. Place the Atheist Balus in the arena, and let us see if his fall will frighten any of these Christian fools into wisdom."

The crowd of victims was instantly

hustled into a narrow space, or rather pen, surrounded by a strong wooden grating to protect them from the intrusion of the wild animals who were about to be let loose.

Balus remained alone in the centre of the arena.

"Take courage!" he cried to his late companions. "Be not dismayed though I am smitten down. Through the mouth of the lion I go into the kingdom of God."

The audience laughed scornfully. Mockery and reproach were cast at him from every side of the amphitheatre, but he remained unmoved. His garments were taken from him, but he said that white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb were being prepared for him by the angels of the Lord. A gladiator smote him on the mouth, and he rejoiced, saying, "So was Christ reviled."

At length the bars of the cages were uplifted, and the wild beasts were let loose. Two came forth simultaneously—a fierce African elephant, and a hungry Numidian lion; and both sprang towards the deacon at the same instant.

He neither trembled nor spoke, but regarded them with a steady, unflinching gaze.

The animals looked at him and hesitated. The next moment the elephant was careering round the arena in search of its den with its trunk in the air, and the lion lay motionless at the feet of its proffered prey.

"The God of Daniel protects the Christian!" cried a voice from the body of the amphitheatre.

"The true God protects all who worship him," responded Balus. "They shall not see death."

He would have said more, but the uproar

of the spectators made it impossible to speak.

"By witchcraft and sorcery he is preserved," shouted the people. "Down with the Atheists and their spells!"

Meanwhile the keepers of the wild beasts strove to provoke the fury of the reposing lion, but he regarded all their endeavours with a calm indifference.

"Drive the animals back to their places," commanded Decius at last, "and let the gladiators thrust their spears into the man who hath held up the gods of the nation to derision."

And so Balus fell.

While the dead body of the deacon lay bleeding upon the ground, the Christians, who had been his companions, were released from their confinement, and brought before the Emperor once again. The dreadful sight which they had been compelled to

witness had had its effects. Most of the men were trembling, many of the women were fainting, the children were weeping violently, and all were ghastly white. That triumphant spirit which had supported them when they came into the arena seemed to have been crushed out of them by the fall of their leader. Decius thought that he had conquered as he contemplated the altered demeanour of the group.

With an attitude of assurance he signalled to the officiating priest to place his little altar in the centre of the small circle of Christians, and to prepare incense. The Emperor was influenced by no spirit of cruelty. He did not wish to destroy his subjects if he could obtain their submission.

Most earnestly he desired to preserve Quintilia for the sake of Plotinus, as well as for the attractions which she possessed, but when his gaze rested upon her countenance

a shiver struck him. He felt that she was lost, however many of the others might be saved; for although her face was also white and sad and horror-struck by the sight of the tragedy she had witnessed, it still retained its former expression of expectancy and resignation.

"Quintilia," he said, almost in a tone of petition, "will you sacrifice *now?* Will you plunge your friends into sorrow and lamentation by remaining obstinate? Sacrifice and live."

"Never," replied Quintilia firmly; and she returned the observation of the Emperor with a steadfast gaze.

Decius pointed to the corpse of Balus.

"Will you lie like that?" he asked.

"Why not?" replied Quintilia boldly, all the glory which had before transformed her countenance returning as she spoke. "That is not Balus, and this body when it is

mangled will not be Quintilia. What say you, O my friends?" she added, turning to the Christians who stood around her. "Do you fear death? No, I see you do not. Its dread aspect is appalling, and the flesh shrinks from its sight and its touch, but the apparent enemy is an angel in disguise."

"True, true!" shouted the Christians, recovering their courage; "we will die. Death is but a passing out of darkness into light."

"Yes, we will die," echoed Quintilia in a clear, ringing voice, stretching forth her arms towards the heavens. "We will lie down and sleep, and awake in Paradise. Farewell, earth! we scorn the idols which thy children worship, and resign ourselves into the hands of the true and only God. Let Him do what seemeth Him best unto our bodies, for we know that He will receive our spirits unto Himself."

The impassioned tones and looks of Quintilia spellbound the cruel audience while she spoke, but when her voice was hushed a thousand tongues clamoured for her destruction. "She is a sorceress!" they cried; "down with her! down with her companions!"

Decius reluctantly gave the order for the massacre, and immediately the dens were reopened, and the lions, which had been reserved for the occasion, crept cautiously forth with blood-shot eyes and gaping jaws.

Plotinus could bear no more. He covered his face with a corner of his toga; but though he could veil the sight which distressed his eyes, he could not shut out all the sounds of the tragedy which was being enacted. His ear was painfully afflicted by the angry roaring of the infuriated animals, and the screams of their weaker victims. He swayed to and fro in his seat, and was

as though he would have fallen senseless to the ground.

Suddenly a wild, sharp shout shook the foundations of the amphitheatre like a terrific clap of thunder. It was an ejaculation of surprise uttered by thousands of people. A victim had been snatched from the very midst of the lions. The act had been so peremptory and unexpected, that none had done more than catch a glimpse of the bold adventurer. The helmet and breastplate of a gladiator had been seen to glitter for a moment among the medley of victims, and then he had turned and fled with his prey towards the vomitory from whence he had issued, flashing his sword as he ran.

The shout was silenced as suddenly as it had been raised; the audience remained paralyzed, and all eyes were turned towards the Emperor.

Calm and stern he sat, making no movement. He alone knew who had been rescued; but was it too late? Perhaps the guards had already stopped the fugitives.

They would have done so, but the moment they had recovered from their astonishment, Favorinus, who had distracted their attention, was there to misdirect them. Listening to his wild suggestions, they ran hither and thither, searching here and there in a bewildered fashion.

The spy had been a match for a legion of soldiers, and he considered that he should also have sufficient sesterces from his patron to pay a legion as a reward for his wit.

The discerning Decius instantly perceived how matters were. He rose majestically from his seat and ordered the programme to proceed. "The gods do not desire that victim," said he quietly, "therefore let her go."

Meanwhile the last of the victims fell in the arena, and Quintilia, the maiden who had been rescued, was hurried towards the house of Calvus the ironsmith by a circuitous route through unfrequented streets.

The little hunchback ran panting and growling by the side of the fugitives.

"It is ill work making such speed," said he, "by the gods!"

"A sesterce for every step, O Calvus," answered the maiden's preserver, grasping the cold hand which he had in his with a firmer hold. Quintilia still moved like one walking in sleep.

"Mine, mine!" whispered Claudius Bromius as they hastened on.

"It must be the Lord's will," thought Quintilia, "else had He not given me unto him this second time." But she said never a word aloud.

Lela stood in the rotten portico of her old

abode. She cast herself into the arms of Quintilia, and welcomed her as one risen from the dead. Then she turned to the hunchback and said kindly, "It is well done, O good Calvus; thou shalt have thy reward."

"I will have thee," answered Calvus. "Thou hast promised it."

"If I live," replied Lela in a strange voice.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LELA.

THE excitement in the city had subsided, and the pleasure-satiated children of old Rome were taking their repose. Patrician and plebeian, stranger and slave, lay upon the pallet in a heavy, drunken sleep, impervious to dreams, or in a fitful slumber, haunted by exaggerated phantoms of the actions and the scenes which had enlivened the departed day. Meanwhile the oil was exhausted in the last of the lamps which had illuminated the streets, and the prayers of the Christian and the mourner, who kept vigil because of the dead in the amphitheatre, resolved themselves into murmurs, which weariness

presently hushed, to give the sad spirit a moment's comfort in a grateful insensibility.

A divine moon had succeeded to the throne of the heavens, and all the accursed city was bathed in its light. It had arisen directly over the amphitheatre, which was now divested of its canopy, and the brightest of its beams descended into the arena. Thus the mangled remains of the martyred saints were covered with a pall of celestial refulgence, and doubtless the presence of invisible angels contributed to its glory.

The silence in the amphitheatre was mysterious and profound. Not so much as the rustle of a leaf was heard, and its solemnity was increased by the gigantic circle of empty benches. Tier above tier arose the seats of the spectators, springing from a depth of intense shadow filled with darkness, outlined by moonlight, until on the

topmost barrier rested a diadem of unbroken sheen—a great halo, marking the most sacred spot that night in Rome.

Suddenly there appeared in one of the empty benches a solitary female figure, with her hair dishevelled and her face wearing an expression of the most poignant grief and suffering. Like a phantom she started forth from a shadow and stood forward in the moonlight. Grasping the low stone parapet before her with both hands, she bent over it and let the tears which streamed from her eyes fall whither they would. They dropped into the blood-stained arena, and rested upon a face calm in death. But the weeper thought not of the dead. Indeed, she appeared unconscious of their presence. They were at rest, and the last of their tears was shed. What need had they of pity? It was the living who suffered and were craving for sympathy.

In what quarter was it to be sought? Lela—for it was Lela—stretched forth her arms and lifted her hands towards the heavens, mutely seeking comfort from the invisible source of all consolation.

God never fails us, but in her agony poor Lela thought He had done so. Her attitude of petition was abandoned with a gesture of despair. "What shall I do?" she cried, in a sharp, penetrating voice, which expressed the pain she felt. "Hast Thou forsaken me, O my God!—my God! in Whom I have put my trust; let this bitter cup pass from my lips." Then she buried her face in her hands, and added with a great effort, "Not my will, but Thine be done. Only give me courage to endure, or I die."

Poor Lela! she had vague thoughts of angels coming to minister unto her, and an indescribable sensation of awe possessed her mind as she awaited their advent. She

trembled violently, and her heart seemed to beat with an audible sound. But when they came not, a cold sweat beaded her brow—a deadly faintness seized upon her frame.

Lela started to her feet and endeavoured to shake off the grasp of insensibility. For although she desired death, she was alarmed at every sign of his approach. She could not die there alone—alone in the deserted amphitheatre. With frightened eyes she glanced around at the dark shadows which filled the places of the spectators—at the radiant touches of white light which here and there dispersed the gloom—at the dead lying beneath their transparent pall of moonbeams in the gigantic arena.

Earnestly her gaze rested on the remains of the saints. "I could have died with them," she murmured, excusing her weakness. "They would have supported me in the presence of death. Their faith would have

strengthened mine. How many of their number had less courage than I have! Oh that it had been permitted for me to depart with them!" The regret was followed by a piteous lament. In a paroxysm of grief she cried out, "Why was I spared? I never sought escape—why was I saved?" Her heart answered, "Thy preservation has been the means of preservation to others." Ah, that was true! But at what a cost? Poor Lela beat her breast, and her tears flowed forth again more plenteously than before. She could not pay the cost of her noble acts. She could not marry Calvus. Her whole being revolted from the idea, and yet how was she to escape the fulfilment of her rash vow.

Lela had come into the deserted amphitheatre to ponder over this perplexity, but her mind was disturbed by her wild imagination, and meaningless thoughts flitted

through her brain. In vain she prayed—prayed for help or resignation. The sacred words were only uttered, and so they brought no comfort to the bruised spirit. "If I live," she groaned, "I must fulfil my promise. Reveal unto me, O God, what Thy will is." Sinking upon the ground, and grovelling upon the rough stones which made the foundation of the bench where she had taken refuge, she repeated the words again and again, now in a pain-sharpened voice that startled all the echoes; now in a hollow, stifled whisper, like the last utterance of a broken heart.

But the cloud that was over the stricken maiden deepened in tone, gathered in force. There showed no indication of a ray of light through its intense darkness. Despair seized upon Lela. She had warded off the enemy with a brave spirit for a long period, but exhaustion had disarmed her at last.

She ceased suddenly to weep, and starting to her feet with a gesture of madness, rushed wildly down the many steps and through the innumerable passages which led to the portico of the amphitheatre. Thence she fled rapidly in the direction of the Tiber.

Lela's running was a flight—a flight from herself. Tears had blinded her eyes, suffering had deadened her senses, and she heeded not whither she ran. On and on she hurried, speeding with the swift foot of a hunted fawn.

"I cannot do it," she gasped, "I cannot do it. I cannot marry Calvus, but if I live I must."

The face of the hideous ironsmith haunted her imagination. She felt his presence, and supposed him following after her in her flight. The dreadful fancy quickened her speed until her feet no longer seemed to touch the ground.

With her gaze fixed upon the star-besprinkled firmament, and her hands clasped convulsively together upon her heaving bosom, with her flowing robe floating behind her, and her unbound tresses spread in the breeze, Lela flew forward. A hare pursued by a greyhound was not more swift, and a singular instinct guided her harmlessly over the various obstacles which bestrewed her path.

But nearer and nearer she advanced to the greatest obstacle of all.

The Tiber was running directly across her path, and she knew it not.

If she had looked around for one instant she would have remembered the vicinity of the river, but her mind was preoccupied. Her attention was fascinated by the stars.

"Aulus Camillus," she cried, "God hath forsaken me. Hear thou my cry. Save me from Calvus, save me, save me!"

Then she beat her breast and declared passionately that God had not forsaken her, but that she had forsaken God.

And still she fled on crying, "Mercy! Mercy!" all the while advancing nearer and nearer to the river bank.

It was better to die than to live in such agony.

"Mercy! Mercy! O God, save me from Calvus. I cannot forget Aulus Camillus: where he is let me be."

Poor child! God pitied her, and in His pity He permitted her to take an accidental step which brought an answer to her prayer.

The next morning there floated upon the Tiber a beautiful maiden with her hands folded upon her breast, and her face calm in death.

Lela was true to the memory of Aulus Camillus.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HERMIT.

THAT same night Claudius Bromius and the physician Paulinus escorted Quintilia to Ostia, and placed her on board the ship which had been waiting so long for its passengers by the shore near the villa of Quintilius.

The master instantly ordered the anchor to be lifted, and while this was being done Claudius Bromius took the hand of Quintilia and pressed it to his lips. "Quintilia," he said, "farewell, and may fair winds carry thee swiftly to Sicily, the strange land whither I send thee. There thou wilt find a home prepared for thy reception. Occupy it and employ thyself as seemeth unto thee

best. The shadow of Claudius Bromius shall not darken thy threshold. In the heat of my success at thy rescue I called thee mine, but I retract the words. Thou art God's, and not mine. I am not worthy of thee. Forget me and be happy. Forget me, but before thou dost erase mine image from thy mind, utter one prayer on my behalf. The love of thee hath made me a better man. Loving thee hath led me to the love divine. I am a Christian. Farewell, and may we meet hereafter in the kingdom of God."

He spoke, and turning suddenly, leapt into the boat which was waiting to convey him back to the shore. Quintilia was about to answer him, but he dare not trust himself to hear her speak. Nor did he once raise his eyes to observe her as the distance was widened between them.

Bending forward, he hid his face in his hands, and did not alter his attitude until

the prow of the boat struck the side of the landing-place.

"It was well done, O patrician," remarked Paulinus, the physician. Then he looked at Quintilia to notice her mood.

With dreamy eyes and folded hands, the stately maiden watched the receding boat.

The tears arose slowly and bedimmed her eyes.

Paulinus placed his hand upon her shoulder. "My child," he said tenderly, "what thinkest thou?"

"I would he had not gone," replied Quintilia.

And Paulinus treasured up her words in his heart.

The change in Claudius Bromius was soon manifest in his conduct. He walked in silence and solitude through the deserted halls of his mansion. The spirit of revelry which once triumphed there was now

smitten with the wand of destruction. To the mind of Bromius the past was full of spectres that haunted him, and he saw no prospect of escaping them. He loaded himself with reproaches. He wondered how he could ever so far have prostituted his reason as to think that man was made for nothing higher than the pleasures of sense. He spent his mornings and his nights in weeping. He knew that there was forgiveness with God, but it seemed as if he could never forgive himself. His thoughts concerning Quintilia were also altogether changed. She was a saint, he was unworthy even of her friendship. Henceforth his life must be spent in penance and mortification as atonement for the errors of the past. In this state of mind Bromius passed many days without a comforter. The Christians whom he knew were dead. Plotinus visited him, but the philosopher had no consola-

tion to give beyond that of recommending entire separation from the world. He told Bromius that he must flee to the desert and there live retired from man, for it was impossible for him to avoid sin in such a world of corruption.

Bromius accordingly retired for a time to the now deserted villa of Quintilia, by the permission of Plotinus.

Every day he spent some hours walking on the sands, still groaning under the load that oppressed him. One day, as he was standing in silence, listening to the noise of the waters, he heard the sound of a human voice. He listened more eagerly, and thought it must be some one in suffering or danger. The first words he caught were a petition for mercy for Christ's sake. He turned towards the place from which this sound seemed to come, and saw the form of a man bent, by the mouth of a cave. It

was a Christian earnest in prayer. He was entreating God to change the hearts of their rulers, that the disciples of Christ might live in peace. Bromius listened in silence till the petitioner had ended. He then approached nearer. The man seemed terribly startled at the sight of Bromius, and withdrew hastily into the cave. The patrician rightly surmised that he had been mistaken for a spy sent by the Emperor to bring him to trial for his adherence to the faith of Christ. He therefore approached the mouth of the cave, and said in a loud voice :—

"I am no enemy, so do not fear to come forth. He that speaks to thee has cause to believe in Christ, and is glad to find another who is of the household of faith."

"I am glad to meet a Christian," said the stranger, instantly appearing. "I fled from Rome when Decius came to the Imperial state, for I knew that I had no choice but

death, or voluntary exile from the society of men. I did not wish to die, but exile was no hardship, for I wished to be alone with God. I had sinned, and I desired to expiate my sins."

Bromius heaved a sigh. He also had done many things which he now repented, and for which he would be glad to make atonement. Perhaps this hermit might tell him how to fulfil his wishes. He asked to hear more of his history. The recluse regarded the patrician keenly for some moments, as though he would read his inmost thoughts. Then he said: "I take you for a true disciple. Sit by me upon this piece of rock and I will reveal to you all that concerns my life. My name is Publius Naso. I am not of high rank, but simply the son of a freedman. My father had a vineyard, and I tended his vines. It was in a solitary place, and many Christian friends

of my parents came there to worship. Thus I learned their faith, and became at last a member of their congregation. My search after the truth had been earnest and ardent, and then I found it; I gave up all for Christ. O stranger, I even parted from my well-beloved betrothed, thinking that I could better serve God as a recluse, as a hermit!"

"And were you satisfied that you had done wisely?" inquired Claudius Bromius with eagerness.

"I was not," answered the hermit mournfully.

"And wherefore, O Publius," questioned the patrician, "have you repented becoming a Christian?"

"No, that is not possible," said Publius, "but I would I had not departed from the order of God's world. We are to live in families and in society, and not to flee to solitary and desolate places."

"Strange," said Bromius to himself, "that at such a moment I should meet such a man." Then addressing the hermit, he said, "Publius, do you not find in this solitude blessed seasons of communion with the Unseen? It seems to me as if here I should be dwelling in the very courts of the golden palace of our God."

"I do not deny," answered Publius, "that I have many delights, but I shall never cease to regret that I left the world where I might have done good to others, to spend my time in the pleasures of solitary contemplation. The maiden to whom I was betrothed might have become a Christian also, and if Christianity is to influence society there must be Christian households."

"Why did you not return to the world when these thoughts visited you first?' asked Bromius.

"I did," replied the hermit, "and found that God had punished me for my conduct. My betrothed was dead."

The poor recluse spoke with much emotion.

"O stranger," said Claudius Bromius, after a pause, "your case has some resemblance to mine. Your thoughts interpret mine to myself.

"I loved a Christian maiden while I was not a Christian, but a votary of the philosophy of pleasure, but she would not listen to my appeals, though I had saved her life when Pompey's theatre was on fire. She refused to burn incense before the gods on the day of the great sacrifice, and was secured in a prison. While she lay there I visited her and besought her to pour out a libation that her life might be saved, but she would not be persuaded. Her enemies made her endure insults and starvation to compel her to the

unrighteous act, but nothing could overcome her firmness, and so at last she was condemned to the lions. God alone knows how I suffered in the interval, and it was then He visited me, and afterwards in His mercy He helped me to rescue her from the very jaws of the lions. When she was safe I cried out in my joy, 'She is mine! she is mine!' but a few moments' reflection made me relinquish the treasure I coveted. I felt that a sacrifice such as this might be an atonement for my sins, but it is not so. I can find no rest because of the memory of those things of which I am now ashamed."

"Have you forgotten that there is such a thing as Divine forgiveness?" answered the hermit. "The death of Christ was the declaration of God's willingness to forgive, and those who have been great sinners are often exalted to great honours. The prodigal son wished to be in his father's house as

one of the hired servants, but the father put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet, and killed for him the fatted calf. God may give you honourable work in the furthering of His kingdom upon earth. Go back to the world, which is still God's. Marry the Christian lady, and set forth the pattern of a Christian family."

In the meantime Quintilia had reached Sicily, and Paulinus had returned to Rome, leaving her settled in the villa which had been provided for her reception by the patrician Bromius. It stood by the sea-shore; and often the Christian maiden might be seen standing upon the flat roof gazing over the sea towards Rome.

One beautiful night Quintilia ascended as usual to her favourite retreat. Moonlight tipped the calm waves, and she leant forward watching their vagaries and listening to the plashing music which they made.

Her thoughts were of the past, and her countenance was sad as she meditated upon its shadows. She thought of Fabian taken away to a dreadful death from the midst of his congregation; of Iope dying upon her bosom in the wretched Roman dungeon; of the mangled form of Balus as it lay in the amphitheatre; of the affrighted yet faithful multitude of Christians slain by the wild beasts in the arena; of Lela finding a rest in the waters of the Tiber; and of Laberius, who had never recovered from the shock of Iope's death—Laberius wandering amid the streets of Rome in the wake of Plotinus, echoing the words of the philosopher without comprehending their meaning. But presently she remembered the light which had come to disperse the gloom, the day of joy which had followed the night of tears, the tranquillity of the hour which was now given her to recruit the strength which had

been so severely tried, and her face became radiant with one of its sweetest, rarest smiles. Why should she weep for Fabian, and Iope, and Lela, and Balus, or for any of those who had perished for their adherence to the faith under the fiat of Decius. They were happy, and they would not return to her if they were permitted so to do. She waved her hand as though she would dismiss their phantoms, and as if in obedience to the motion they gradually faded out of her mind. But as they faded, another phantom—that of one who had played some strange parts in those shadowful days—arose in their stead. She thought of Claudius Bromius. Again the circumstances of her first meeting with the Sophist repeated themselves in her imagination. Again she heard his pleading voice in the peristylium. Again he talked with her in the gloomy dungeon beside the dying Iope, and again

she felt his grasp as he snatched her from the midst of the lions and their victims. His words as they hurried to the house of Calvus rang in her ears. His words, his looks, as he bade her farewell on board the vessel which he had provided for her flight, haunted her memory, and instinctively she repeated the words which she had said at the time to Paulinus.

"I would he had not gone," she murmured aloud; and then again, with a deep sigh, "I would he had not gone."

Suddenly an arm was passed tenderly around her, a hand rested upon hers, and a kiss was pressed upon her brow.

"Paulinus told me," whispered a voice in her ear—the voice of Claudius Bromius. "God hath given thee to me at last."

Quintilia was startled; she had not heard the footsteps of the patrician, and she knew not that he was in the island, but when

she looked up in his face she forgave him his surprise, and did not struggle out of his embrace.

"Thou art mine," he murmured.

For answer she laid her head gently upon his breast.

"How long I have waited for this hour!" said Claudius Bromius. "Even after even I have watched thee unseen, but thy communion with the sea was ever voiceless; I could not guess thy thoughts."

A few minutes later she said, "There are but two clouds in my horizon now. May God restore Laberius to his senses, and give the Christians peace."

"I doubt not both prayers will be answered in due time," replied Claudius Bromius, "and meanwhile let us abide here with patience."

After a few months' residence in Sicily, Bromius and Quintilia returned to Rome.

The fury of the oppressor had ceased, and the tongue of the golden-mouthed orator, once eloquent in praise of the life of pleasure, now ever reverted to the all-absorbing theme—the grace of God, which had called him out of darkness into marvellous light.

CHAPTER XX.

LOOKING FOR A CITY.

PLOTINUS lived on, groping, as he used to say, in the dark cave and longing for the light. More than ever his thoughts reverted to the regeneration of society, and the establishing of a city of God,—a city in which the Divine reason of which all men are partakers would be embodied in laws, the perfect fulfilment of which would be the object of all citizens. He alluded to it in every lecture, generally ending with lamentations over "This old rotten Roman world."

Christian blood had been freely shed, and the blow fell heavily on many whom the philosopher knew and esteemed. Decius

he always believed to be animated by the best motives, but he did not discern his friends from his foes. His object was the reformation of Roman manners, but he raised his arm against those who would have been his most effectual fellow-workers, and so to the Christians he was but another Antichrist, of whom they could say in St. Paul's words, "He that now letteth shall be taken out of the way."

It was not long after the persecution of the Christians had reached its climax, that Plotinus uttered these words in the portico of the Thermæ :—

"We have come to the beginning of the end. The floods of an avenging justice are rolling over the earth. Every day brings tidings of new disasters. Decius, our brave and generous ruler, went to Thrace to subdue the Goths, and fell by the treachery of his own general. Surrounded by the enemy he

sunk in a morass, and his body, weighed down by the weight of his armour, was never found. So sinks Rome under the weight of its vices. The city is doomed. The measure of its iniquities is full. Its calamities come in battalions. The barbarians already possess the distant provinces, and ere long they will be at the gates of the city. Gallus, by whose treachery Decius fell, has betrayed the Empire, and the Romans are to pay tribute to the Goths. How are the mighty fallen! But the gods are just. Eternal justice binds the universe in one. The unjust are the enemies of the gods; yea, and of themselves. O Rome! Rome! thy last days are at hand! Weep and lament for the sorrows that are coming upon thee. Soon, alas! Rome shall be mighty Rome no more!"

And yet the sun was still bright over the temples and the palaces of the great city. The cornfields waved luxuriantly in what is

now the deserted Campagna. The Tiber flowed on with rushing waves, and ocean sent back its verdant tides. The decay was in man, not in nature. Plotinus was a true prophet. With a penetrating insight he could read the future, for he knew the inevitable results which must follow from what he saw around him.

The physician still went to and fro, battling with disease and death, but all hope of ever seeing the Romans morally better had long since departed from him. The prospects of the Empire cast a shadow of melancholy over his once cheerful heart, and it seemed as if even to him had been given a mystical foreboding of the future. His friendship with Plotinus became closer every day. Different as their characters apparently were, there was yet more between them than appeared on the surface. The good qualities of Paulinus were born in

him ; his defects were those of a one-sided profession. Accustomed to have his eyes fixed mainly on the diseased side of humanity, while his studies in their utmost extent were limited to external nature, it was scarcely to be expected that he would enter deeply into the far-reaching thoughts of Plotinus. Still they had both true hearts, and were genuine lovers of men.

The fame of Plotinus continued to increase. His lecture-room was always crowded, and among his hearers and disciples were many women of high rank as well as nobles and senators. His wards also increased, and to such an extent that the question of having a large house was again forced upon him. At this juncture one of his disciples, another rich senator, died, and left him the care of his wife and children. Their home was on the eastern slope of the Aventine, and afforded ample room

for the small commonwealth which Plotinus had as yet been able to bring together. He removed thither with his wards, whose affairs he managed with all the sagacity of a man of the world; and in a short time a community was established which really approached the ideal formed by the philosopher. He provided tutors for the children, took cognizance of their progress in learning, looked over the accounts of their income and expenditure, inculcating on all piety towards God, simplicity of life, and carefulness in the use of their temporal goods. Plotinus possessed, to a marvellous extent, the power of reading men. He could tell a man's character by looking him in the face, and by this faculty he was able to predict the future lives of many of those committed to his charge.

This house on the Aventine was but the embryo model, the mere rudiment of what

the commonwealth was to be. The Emperor Gallienus and his wife Salonina were among the disciples of Plotinus, and were frequent visitors on the Aventine. Plotinus, too, was often at the Imperial palace, setting forth his plans of a new republic and expounding Plato's laws for the regeneration of society. The Emperor promised to rebuild for him a city of Campania, in which men could live according to reason.

Meanwhile the process of dissolution was in rapid progress in the old world. Every day brought tidings of fresh calamities. Valerian, the father of Gallienus, the censor of manners under Decius, had gone against the Persians and been taken prisoner. Usurpers in every part of the Empire assumed the purple, rivalling each other, and rising and falling in rapid succession. Then came the tidings of

earthquakes in divers places, destroying whole cities, while others were inundated by the ocean, which was shaken out of its place by the convulsions of nature. And in the city itself there were many portents of impending sorrows. The ghosts of Romulus and Numa were seen after twilight in the Forum, on the Palatine, and in other public places. Tears were in their eyes, and they gibbered to each other and to the people. No one knew what they said, but all knew what they meant. Pale white horses pranced in the heavens just over the Janiculum. Out of their mouths proceeded streams of fire, while the clouds were metamorphosed into fantastic shapes, sometimes of serpents, dragons, and other monsters which strike terror into the heart of man.

These terrible omens had scarcely disappeared when one morning, Paulinus

was suddenly summoned to the *Vicus Jugarius.* In the night several persons in different families had been smitten by a new and unknown disease. It began with faltering speech and a failure of strength. Some raved like maniacs when the physician arrived, and some were sullen, with rage and fury depicted in their faces, while others sat with sunken eyes and distorted features, as if imploring the help which none could give, and expressing by their looks the prayer of Job, "Have pity upon me, O ye my friends, have pity upon me, for the hand of God hath touched me." Their pulses beat high with fever, their tongues were livid white, and on their bodies were red spots and loathsome swellings. Paulinus was as helpless before the new and strange malady as the Emperor in the presence of the Goths, or Plotinus in the presence of Roman vice.

The physician took note of the symptoms, gave instructions for the treatment of the sufferers by their friends, and returned in haste to the Via Sacra to prepare what medicines he could think of as the most likely to check the disease. At the threshold of his door he met Plotinus and a disciple, engaged in deep and solemn conversation. They had heard of the victories of Sapor, and were waiting to tell him of the new calamities that had befallen the Empire.

"O Paulinus," said the philosopher, beginning the conversation, contrary to his custom, "the end is coming apace. The Persians have invaded Mesopotamia, and are masters of Syria and Armenia."

"There is a worse enemy within the very gates of the city," answered the physician. "A terrible and unheard-of pestilence has appeared in the neighbour-

hood of the Forum. The inhabitants of the wretched streets and lanes will be the first victims, but the monster walking in darkness and wasting at noon-day shall ascend these hills and mow down the rich and the luxurious, as now he makes havoc among the poor and the wretched. Let the monarch tremble in his palace and the patrician in his mansion, for a demon is in the city more destructive than Goth or Persian!"

"Alas!" exclaimed the disciple, "I have heard of his devastations in other lands. He comes from Ethiopia, and is bred of the stagnant marshes and the burning sun."

"And he feeds on putrefaction, on filth, on luxury, on licentiousness; and the Romans have food enough for him," said Paulinus, with a bitterness to which he was not accustomed.

The physician's trumpet of alarm sounded through the city, but with equal pace strode on the pestilence. Before a week had passed there was scarcely a house in Rome in which some one had not fallen a victim. The mansions of the Palatine, the Carinæ, the Velia, and all the fashionable parts of Rome were deserted. The inhabitants had fled in every direction, but not always to escape the pestilence from which they fled.

It was at this time that Bromius and Quintilia returned to Rome. They thought of the woes which were to come upon the earth in the last days, as they read of them in the Christian books, but their first consideration was concerning their duty at such a crisis. Assistance was needed and difficult to obtain. Quintilia knew her vocation as a Christian, and Bromius knew it also. He was no physician, and had never

studied the nature of diseases, nor did he know the virtue of medicines, but he could visit the sick, he could bury the dead, he could help to do battle with the monster Like Christ, the Master whom he now followed, he would stand in the breach between death and man, and, if necessary, he would sacrifice himself in the conflict.

Quintilia put herself at the service of the physician to attend upon the sick. Meanwhile the dead were carried forth by the strong arms of Bromius, who superintended their sepulture, and enforced a law of quarantine for the separation of the infected. He seemed to be present everywhere at every hour of the day and night. The irrepressible energy, once manifest in the revellings in the Latin Road and the rapid coursing of his chariot in the Flaminian, was now employed in a life-and-death struggle with the monster that was the

avenger of Divine justice on the profligacy and the vices of the people.

"Surely," he often said to Plotinus, "when God's judgments are abroad in the earth the inhabitants thereof will learn righteousness."

To this Plotinus would answer, "The day of the Romans is past! They can learn no more lessons." Then would follow a discourse on the regeneration of the world by means of the city of philosophers.

At last the plague was stayed, but the strength of Paulinus had been overtaxed in the conflict. Scarcely had the Romans returned to their dwellings, when the physician was prostrate. He never rallied, nor did he ever seem to share the hope of Plotinus or the Christians concerning a life to come. Yet he died calmly, with a sense of having done his duty to the best of his power. He said little, but did not repine

that his career was ended, and those who knew him best believed that his peaceful departure was something more than mere submission to fate.

Plotinus had an internal malady, for which he refused all remedies recommended by the physicians, and especially their grand prescription, a compound of herbs and viper's flesh. He had, he said, always refused to eat the flesh of ordinary animals for the sustenance of life, and much more that of a viper for the cure of a disease. The plague left his house desolate, and after the death of his friends, his malady became worse. At length his voice became weak, and his eyes dim.

He was taken to the Campania, to the house of a favourite disciple, who cared for him during the last years of his life with the affection of a son for a father.

It was about the eighth hour of the day

when Plotinus was carried out of Rome for the last time. The shadows of evening were beginning to gather, and a sombre cloud was passing over the city. He had come outside the walls and reached a little eminence, beyond which Rome would be lost to view, when he called the bearers of the lectica to pause. A cloud was passing over his soul as sombre as that which hung over Rome. He was thinking of his departure from this life, which in itself was no sorrow, but a cause for rejoicing; yet the retrospect was sad. "Rome," he said, "let me look upon thee once more. I know thy sins and thy sorrows. I have seen thy luxuriousness, thy profligacy, and the plagues that have come upon thee."

The remembrance was too much for the feelings of Plotinus. He wept for the great city. When he had partly recovered, and the tears were wiped away, he looked again

towards Rome and continued his lamentation: "An age has passed since I left Alexandria. I came to Rome expecting to regenerate the world, but the present generation is worse than the one I found; the last stage of corruption has been reached. There can be no further progress in any kind of iniquity. No lessons are learned from calamities. Plagues come and go, but the survivors take no warning. They pursue the same course of depravity as those whom they have survived. Is man never to be wise? Is there no Divine purpose in the world? Must it ever tend to worse? Never since I first sat at the feet of wise Ammonius have I doubted as I do now? I thought there was a moral heart in man, such a heart in every man as I feel in myself—a heart that answers to truth when its sound is heard; but lo, the heart of this people is steeped in sense. There may be hope for

the world, but there is none for Rome. Other nations may rise in whom the sense of righteousness is found, but the day of the Romans is gone for ever!"

The last thought that there might be hope for others was the only solace that remained for Plotinus. It reestablished his faith, that whatever waves of retrogression might arise, the world was still in progress. He had seen all his schemes frustrated, his long labours come to nothing, and his highest hopes cast to the winds. He is old and feeble, and tormented with disease, yet he believes that the world has a better day before it, that it is still in the hands of God.

As his end drew near he summoned another disciple to come and see him before his departure. When he entered Plotinus addressing him said—

"I have been waiting for you. I am striving to reunite that which is divine in

me to that which is divine in the universe."

At this moment a serpent which was under the bed on which he lay glided into a hole in the wall,—an emblem of the good genius that had been with him in life and now in death. He never saw his Platonopolis, but we may be permitted to believe that, like all who have looked for a true polity, he was taken to that city which "hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Ἡμῶν τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει.

THE END.

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